

STATEMENT BY HON. SARAH ACHIENG OPENDI, MINISTER OF STATE FOR HEALTH, UGANDA AT THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON NUTRITION, ROME ITALY

**Excellency the Vice President of Tanzania,
Your Excellencies the Ministers of health & Agriculture
Director General of WHO
Director General of FAO
Excellencies the Ambassadors
UN Special Envoy on Nutrition
Heads of Delegations
Distinguished participants**

I bring greetings to you all from the H.E President Yoweri Museveni, President of Uganda, the Pearl of Africa and thank the Government of Italy for hosting this conference and for the hospitality accorded to us. I also thank the Director General FAO and WHO for your leadership and for jointly organizing this conference under the theme, “*Better Nutrition for better lives.....*”.

Malnutrition is a major problem in the World and has been with us for a long time. It contributes up to 56% to under 5 mortality in developing countries and yet less effort has been paid to tackle it. The major concern of the developing countries has been under nutrition but globally, we are faced with another challenge of over nutrition, obesity. Malnutrition contributes to poor health, aggravates diseases and reduces productivity.

Coupled with this lies the challenge of high fertility rate amongst women, adolescent pregnancies in developing countries, poor hygiene and sanitation, food safety, and food insecurity among others. Women, children and those infected by HIV/AIDS suffer disproportionately because of their high needs for nutrients.

This situation therefore calls for effective interventions by governments to address the challenge so as to enable the vulnerable people (majorly women and children) to have access to health and consumption of nutrient rich foods. Nutrition interventions therefore must be backed up with good health policies focusing at promotion of hygiene and sanitation, availability of safe drinking water, immunization against vaccine preventable diseases and family planning.

In 1962, an American Norman Borlaug successfully initiated the Green revolution by experimenting on disease resistant high yield wheat in Mexico and by 1964, his technologies had spread worldwide. Norman’s success story was that there was a drastic increase in the amount of wheat produced per acreage. Thus with the current advancement in science and technology in this era, we should be more capable of resolving the challenges of food insecurity and malnutrition. Some agencies are promoting bio-fortified foods like beans, maize, rice, millet and orange sweet potatoes rich in micronutrients, but this is not on a large scale. We need to embrace such tested and approved technologies and scale them up in our countries, if we are to avert the issues of malnutrition especially hidden hunger.

Since the last ICN Framework in 1992, global efforts have been made and individual country’s have put in place policies to improve growing and consumption of appropriate

foods. At the global level, the appointment of the a Special Coordinator for the Scale up of Nutrition (SUN) movement by the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon in April 2012 is evidence of the support to Nutrition interventions by the UN agencies.

Uganda is a country of a population of about 34 million people of which 2.4 million (33%) of the children below five years are malnourished. Nationally the prevalence of malnutrition has been gradually reducing though at a slow pace. On a positive note nutrition issues are now high on the government's agenda. We have developed a five year Nutrition Action Plan (2011-2016), which is coordinated by the Prime Minister. Nutrition is not only a health issue but a cross cutting one that requires a multi-sectoral approach.

The Nutrition action Plan aims at improving nutrition status of all Ugandans with specific emphasis on women and children that are most vulnerable.

It is important to also know that Uganda is among the early "SUN" raiser countries and we are implementing nutrition specific interventions with support from the WHO-Accelerating Nutrition Interventions. Government is working towards leveraging resources for the implementation of both specific and sensitive nutrition interventions in a multi-sectoral approach as is reflected in the National Development plan.

Currently the Government of Uganda is in the process of finalizing the Food and Nutrition policy which will focus on nutrition and food security at all levels.

The ICN2 Framework for Action and the Rome declaration therefore should be a right call to us all to address the nutrition challenges and should form part of the post 2015 Agenda. We cannot also underestimate the need for peace and security as vital for our efforts in resolving the issues of hunger and malnutrition.

I wish to reaffirm the Government of Uganda's commitment to fulfilling its constitutional obligation by ensuring food and nutrition security for all its citizens so as to ensure human development and socio-economic wellbeing.

Lets all be the change that we want to see in the world, (Mahatma Ghandi)

For God and My Country !