

Congratulatory message of the Rt Hon Prime Minister of Uganda, Dr Ruhakana Rugunda

The Prime Minister of Uganda congratulates the African Centre for Global Health and Social Transformation on reaching 10 years of existence

I must congratulate ACHEST for being ten years old. It is true that the infant mortality, under-5 mortality or for that matter under 10 mortality is very high amongst organisations in Africa, especially organisations of a professional nature. So the fact that ACHEST has not only lived for 10 years but done wonderful scientific work to guide the continent is a great achievement. But I also encourage you and ourselves to do much more so that we can scale higher and solve more and more health challenges that all of us are acquainted with. In that respect you have set a very good example for other organisations and those of you who might be thinking of setting up some organisations, ACHEST is a good case study to look at. I salute ACHEST for being a model organisation in many ways and being able to address issues local, regional and global.

We do not have to depend on people in Europe or America or Asia or for that matter on the recent advances that have been reported in any of the journals but we can sit down and look at our issues, make the necessary diagnosis and chart a way forward on how to solve our own problems. That confidence, that sense of direction, is in my view critical, and it helps us to move forward. I was happy when you talked of building capacity and synergy. Actually an additional word should be organising capacity, because we have substantial capacity but it remains either scattered or disorganised or waiting to be picked up from different centres of the world as if we don't have problems here which require our attention.

Our people have tended to focus more on serving elsewhere, solving other people's problems, and our own problems have not been adequately addressed, and where they have been addressed we have sometimes been hand-capped without adequate authority, resources and power to really do what we believe we must do. So ACHEST in that respect is helping us to be able to be organised to have the advantages of synergy and to have ourselves gathered like this. This is not a common thing for African scholars, health workers, specialists to come together, discuss and think about Africa's problems and look for solutions. This in my view is a great thing for the professionals.

Bridging the gap

Government of Uganda without any doubt will give (not money) a lot of support and this support may take different forms; it could be political support, it may be support towards your cause which you think the country should embark on. There should be as much harmony as possible between ACHEST and 'ACHEST-like' institutions with government so that we can converge and deliver the same message to the people concerned and to governments.

There has tended to be a gap between government and the professionals, and the gap sometimes comes because of inadequate communication between the professionals and those in political authority, in parliament or cabinet, who make political decisions. These political decisions are critical because that's where the money is allocated and allocation of money also determines on the work to be done and direction to be taken. ACHEST is a bridge and I must salute my brother Francis Omaswa and his colleagues because they have tried to bridge this gap through writings and books that have been published. Ministers of Health and other health workers have been given ammunition and information on how to move forward. Therefore, in conclusion, let us ensure that the channels of communication between government, professionals and other decision-makers are clear, otherwise we will end up being frustrated.

I am happy that ACHEST has been doing well. One of the areas it has helped government has been in the fight against Ebola and I think their messages, advice, their work has made Uganda safer because of the high degree of preparedness that the country has on the basis of this advice. National Health Insurance (NHI) policy issues are now dominating the scene. In the case of Uganda we have decided to adopt a National Health Insurance policy. Now that cabinet has passed it, it now awaits promulgation by parliament. The figures that we have are that about 40% of household incomes go for health care (out of pocket). We think that NHI will help to solve this problem. The point about Universal Health Coverage is a very interesting one because Alma Ata gave us the answer a long time ago; so long as there is adequate primary health care complicated cases can be handled. I think we should remain focused to ensure that the ordinary person gets the essential health care they need.

I am extremely happy to be here with you, I am happy about this solidarity, happy about the support from WHO Afro. We would like to be as close as possible so that the efforts which are being made can benefit from the rich experience you have and resources. I am happy that ACHEST has been able to bring us together. I am happy that capacity is being built and that we are being organised so that professionals don't have to be orphans: even when you leave your government job as a professional, especially health professional, you should not be an orphan, you should know that there is an umbrella, an organisation that can optimally utilise your capacity. This leadership is very much appreciated and once again, let me take this opportunity to salute all of you, to welcome all of you and to salute ACHEST for being 10 years old. We look forward to the celebration of 20 years.