

# 16 districts free from river blindness

By Taddeo Bwambale

Over 1.5 million Ugandans are no longer at risk of contracting river blindness, a parasitic infection that causes itching, skin discoloration, rashes, eye lesions or permanent blindness.

This follows Uganda's successful campaign to interrupt transmission of the disease by providing free drugs to affected communities and the killing of black flies that spread the disease.

Health minister Dr Jane Ruth Aceng told a panel of health experts at a meeting in Kampala yesterday that transmission of the debilitating disease had

been halted in 16 of the most affected districts.

River blindness is transmitted through the bites of black flies, which breed in fast-flowing rivers and streams. At its peak, river blindness affected 35 districts in Uganda, putting 3.5 million people at risk.

According to Aceng, treatment coverage for onchocerciasis has reached all endemic communities in 37 districts, attaining at least 80% coverage of the affected population.

The minister made the disclosure during the 10th session of the Uganda Onchocerciasis Elimination Expert Advisory meeting held at Sheraton Kampala Hotel.