

UNAIDS boss asks MPs to promote HIV campaigns

By Moses Mulondo

The new Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS) country director, Karusa Kiragu, has appealed to parliamentarians and other leaders to embark on a massive campaign to encourage all Ugandans to find out their HIV status.

Kiragu argued that such an initiative would greatly bring down the HIV/AIDS prevalence in the country.

While paying a courtesy call on the Speaker of Parliament yesterday, Kiragu said it is necessary for all political leaders to get involved in encouraging their people to go for testing to know their HIV status so that they protect themselves and their loved ones.

Kiragu, who is barely one month-old in office, stated that their focus would be on making sure that President Yoweri Museveni's campaign of eliminating HIV in Uganda by 2030 succeeds.

The Presidential Fast-Track Initiative on Ending AIDS as a Public Health Threat in Uganda, which was launched on June 6, outlines key subject



Rebecca Kadaga

areas in enhancing HIV prevention and closing the gap of new infections, particularly among girls, young women and men. It also highlights consolidating progress on elimination of mother-to-child transmission.

Other plans in the Initiative include accelerating implementation of "test and treat," ensuring domestic financing sustainability for the HIV response and strengthening institutional effectiveness for a multi-sectoral response.

Kiragu noted with concern that majority of people who are unaware of their HIV status are men which is why most HIV

Kadaga appealed to UNAIDS to extend HIV treatment services to the fishing communities, which are susceptible to HIV/AIDS

deaths occur in men.

She explained that while Uganda registered a 56% decline in AIDS-related deaths between 2010 and 2016, the major concern is the high deaths among the men.

"Of the 23,000 adult deaths recorded in 2016, 15,300 were males and 7,700 females. It means that there were twice as many deaths among men compared to the females. We need more efforts towards encouraging men to go for HIV testing," she elaborated.

During the launch of the Presidential Fast-Track Initiative, President Museveni urged men to voluntarily go for counselling and testing in order to access treatment if diagnosed with HIV so that they can suppress the virus before it impairs their immune system.

Kiragu, who has taken over from Amakobe Sande, informed the Speaker that on many occasions in the past money coming through UNAIDS to help Uganda was taken back after the failure to have it utilised.

Kadaga attributed the problem to the fact that Parliament has not been monitoring funds provided by donors.

She assured Kiragu that in the next budget cycle, Parliament would scrutinise both locally generated funds, as well as funds coming from donors, to ensure the money is well utilised.

Kadaga appealed to UNAIDS to extend a helping hand by providing HIV prevention and treatment services to the fishing communities which she said are highly susceptible to HIV/AIDS.