

REMARKS

BY

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PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

AT

THE ANNUAL PLANET YOUTH CONFERENCE

REYKJAVIK, ICELAND

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I thank **Mr. Jon Sigfusson**, the Chairman of the Board of Planet Youth, for inviting me to attend the Planet Youth Conference – 2025. I have not been able to join you physically, due to earlier scheduled engagements. However, I have delegated **Hon. Balaam Barugahara**, the Minister of State for Youth and Children Affairs, to represent me and deliver my message.

I am happy to convey warm greetings, from the people of Uganda, to all those taking part in the Planet Youth Conference. I thank Planet Youth for organising such an important gathering of Policymakers, Educators, Researchers and Community Leaders, to deliberate on how to combat the monster of substance abuse, among the youth. Substance abuse is a major global health crisis. It should be addressed through the collective efforts of both government and non-government actors.

Uganda has a long history of combating health crises such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the immunisable diseases, Ebola, Malaria, Coronavirus diseases, etc. The prevention strategy has been our biggest weapon in reducing the disease burden in Uganda. Therefore, it is possible to reduce substance abuse, through the Prevention Model, as articulated by Planet Youth.

In Uganda, government is implementing the following proactive measures to address the challenge of substance abuse among the youth:

1. **Economic empowerment of the youth:** This involves ensuring that the young people are educated, healthy

and equipped with a skill that can enable them to earn a living. Government has created wealth funds, like the Youth Fund, the Parish Development Model, etc., that extend financial assistance to the youth, engaged in production in the four sectors of commercial agriculture, services, industries and ICT. This has helped to transform the youth into creators of wealth and jobs, in the community. Economic empowerment of the youth reduces the chances of living a risk-ridden life. Poverty and unemployment are risk factors for substance abuse. If the youth remain poor, they will not attach value and meaning to their lives; and therefore, resort to harmful behaviours.

2. **Awareness campaigns:** Government is carrying out awareness campaigns in schools and local communities to educate the youth about the dangers of substance abuse. This involves mobilising parents, guardians, teachers, local leaders, etc., to participate in combating substance abuse in schools, homes and other settings. The school and home environments must be morally strong and stable, in order to inculcate the right values and attitudes into the young people.
3. **Strong laws and enforcement.** Government has put in place strong laws to curb drug production, sale and use. Uganda has a law on the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, which seeks to curtail trafficking, abuse and proliferation of contrabands such as marijuana and cocaine, into Uganda. Strong laws must be accompanied by strong enforcement

mechanisms in order to address the proliferation of drugs and harmful substances in the community.

4. **Rehabilitation and Support.** Rehabilitation centres have been put in place, where victims of substance abuse receive professional support and counselling.

The fight against substance abuse can be won. Planet Youth has shown us that it is possible to surmount this monster which is robbing our youth of their potential and dragging our countries backward. Let us stand together to protect our future generations from the dangers of drug abuse and build a healthier and more productive world.

I thank you all.