STATEMENT OF PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV ON THE INTERNATIONAL CANDLELIGHT MEMORIAL DAY; 17 MAY 2024, HOIMA CITY

The Guest of Honour, Rt. Hon. Prime Minister
Invited guests
Ladies and gentlemen

Today, People Living with HIV (PLHIV) join the rest of the world to commemorate the Candle Light Day as we remember our beloved ones who succumbed to AIDS. It is a day that we remember our fallen heroes, yet ignites a flame of hope for us living positively.

This year’s Global theme is “Together we remember, together we heal, through love and solidarity!” which is a call to strengthening support systems for PLHIV and affected individuals in the HIV response in a holistic manner. Similarly, the country theme “Ending AIDS by 2030: keeping communities at the centre” is a commitment to ending all sorts of obstacles hindering community engagement and participation as part of epidemic control.

As People Living with HIV, with support from the Government, AIDS Development Partners and other community stake holders, we have moved a long way in reducing AIDS related deaths and increasing the number of PLHIV accessing life saving treatment. We have remained at the centre to curb new HIV transmissions and promote positive living towards an HIV free generation. To all people who have supported and worked with us, we are very grateful.

It is important to note that as PLHIV, we have tremendously contributed to the HIV&AIDS response in various ways. For instance;

- We have peers at health facility and community levels as expert clients. All ART accredited sites in Uganda have our community resource persons and this has greatly enabled adherence to treatment, retention in care and viral load suppression.
- We are part of advocacy efforts for the promotion and protection of rights of PLHIV through representation at all levels
- Through psycho social support initiatives, we have greatly reduced transmission of mother to child and AIDS deaths. We have individually confronted the barriers like stigma and discrimination and promoted positive living
- We continue to provide evidence through surveys and in development of policies and guidelines to support our community and national work
- We have formed coordination structures of PLHIV up to community level that eases networking and collaboration. We have cohorts of young people, men, women, PWD, teachers, armed personnel, religious as well district forums throughout Uganda.

Despite these achievements, a number of barriers remain in the way of epidemic control such as stigma, low treatment literacy levels that continue to affect adherence and retention in care, prevailing co-morbidities such as TB and Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs), socio-economic challenges that continue to expose young people to new HIV infections and
the mass awareness campaigns that used to rally people to the HIV prevention efforts have greatly dwindled. At the moment, the country is experiencing stock out of ARVs and other essential drugs. With the coming of oil, we are concerned about the likely exposure of young people to HIV in the Albertine region. We therefore need to get back to the drawing board for a more effective community engagement in the response.

Following the theme of ‘Ending AIDS by 2030: Keeping Communities at the Centre’, the community of PLHIV would like to see more;

• Concerted effort to stigma reduction through empowerment programmes
• Economic empowerment to reduce vulnerabilities of PLHIV
• Integration of co-morbidities as we age gracefully with HIV
• Increased domestic funding as external funding continues to reduce
• Strengthening community structures of different groups of PLHIV at different levels.
• Adopting and investing in short course regimens for TB prevention and treatment
• Commodity security to eliminate all forms of stock outs

As we get to epidemic control, we are committed to continue taking charge at various fronts to ensure that HIV&AIDS is no longer a public health threat. We call upon everybody to actively involve PLHIV as we re-engage communities for effective epidemic control. This collaborative approach will uphold the Greater/meaningful Involvement of PLHIV (GIPA/MIPA) principle to accelerate the interventions in the HIV response towards Ending AIDS by 2030.

Together, we stand as one, fostering compassion and resilience in the face of adversity, and championing love and solidarity for a future where every person living with HIV enjoys their right to a healthy and dignified life, free from stigma and discrimination

We PLHIV are committed to confronting all the barriers that are rendering epidemic control difficult. And we commit to work with all the partners, state and non state, to eliminate AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.

Together for a Positive Difference!