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STATEMENT

BY

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PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF UGANDA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

ON GLOBAL HEALTH AND FOREIGN POLICY: MEASURES TO CONTAIN
AND COMBAT THE RECENT EBOLA OUTBREAK IN WEST AFRICA

New York,
September 19, 2014

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Mr. President,

Since this is the first time that I am taking the floor, I would like to congratulate you on your assumption of the Presidency of this 69th session of the General Assembly.

Mr. President

Uganda has experienced Ebola 4 times in the last 14 years with our worst experience in 2000 to 2001 involving only 425 cases. In 2001 it killed 224 people including Dr. Matthew Lukwiya, the doctor who accurately diagnosed and reported its occurrence. In 2007, it killed only 37 people while in 2009 it killed 17. In direct comparison, as of a week ago the reported cases in West Africa were over 4700 and are still on the rise.

Mr. President,

Uganda is prepared to share her experiences and stands ready to continue providing the assistance required during this trying time. Our experience has taught us that aggressive public health campaigns are key in curbing the spread of this disease. The Uganda government was unreserved in sending out warnings, replete with descriptions of symptoms and advice on how to handle those presenting with it as well as describing proper procedures for handling and burying the dead.

In Uganda, as soon as the first Ebola cases were identified, public health officials created make-shift quarantines, called a press conference together with the World health Organization asking for help. We exposed the problem right away and de-mystified any stigma attached to it.

Other reasons, Mr. President include Uganda’s active infectious disease-surveillance network, which offers a quick reaction time to suspected cases. The quick local response created time for International assistance to reach us. People looked out for the symptoms, and they immediately reported suspected cases to surveillance officials. It’s one of the reasons Uganda has successfully stamped out four Ebola outbreaks, even ones that have occurred
in urban areas. Our high adult-literacy rates also played a role because they increased the options of communication media to the general public.

Mr. President,

Uganda shares the grave concern expressed by the rest of the Member States about the rapid deterioration of the health situation in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, that the epidemic has begun to grow exponentially in that region, with no respect for borders and we stand in solidarity with them.

In July 2014, Uganda sent a team of 20 of our top Ebola Experts to Sierra Leone and Liberia. The team had specializations including epidemiology, case management, community education and psycho-social support. However, they quickly discovered that this was a situation where even protective equipment was insufficient. The medical workers needed equipment, training and resources. The disease once again claimed the life of one of Uganda's senior surgeons, Dr. Samuel Muhumuza Mutoro, in Monrovia. Fragile health systems create weaker support systems for medical personnel, who could potentially walk off a job that unnecessarily increases their chances of exposure.

Mr. President,

In this respect, Uganda welcomes the Secretary-General's decision to establish the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER). We agree that the priorities of UNMEER should be to stop Ebola, treat patients, ensure continued services, maintain stability and prevent further outbreak.

Africa has battled several challenges and has built up its medical human resource in spite of very many odds stacked against us, including HIV/AIDS. We cannot afford to lose the battle against this disease.

I thank you