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MINISTRY OF HEALTH  
P.O. Box 7272  
KAMPALA,  
UGANDA

In ANY CORRESPONDENCE ON  
THIS SUBJECT PLEASE QUOTE NO:  
**ADM 105/309/20**

April 6, 2015

To .....

Dear Sir/Madam

**RE: REQUEST FOR PARTNERSHIP IN MOBILIZING THE MASSES TO JOIN  
THE NATIONAL SICKLE CELL SCREENING CAMPAIGN**

World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that over 250,000 babies are born with sickle cell disease (SCD) annually in sub-Saharan Africa, and only 10% - 50% of them survive beyond five years of age. Data describing the magnitude of the sickle cell problem are lacking in most African countries. The available data on prevalence were mainly from older studies and small numbers of hospitalized patients. In Uganda, approximately 25,000 children are born with sickle cell disease every year, but unfortunately 70-80% die before their 5<sup>th</sup> birthday. There is no newborn screening program in the country, and children are often diagnosed late after development of a crisis. With lack of a screening program, diagnosis is usually made late and many children die before they are diagnosed.

In February 2014, the Ministry of Health working in collaboration with Cincinnati Children's Hospital based in USA, Makerere University and the Sickle Cell Association of Uganda launched a sickle cell survey with the objective of establishing the prevalence and mapping out the entire country. The screening was conducted at Central Public Health Laboratories (CPHL). The survey ended on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015. About 100,000 infants from all districts in the country were reached. Data analysis is now complete and the information generated from this survey has given us a clear picture of the prevalence of sickle cell trait and disease

across all districts of Uganda. This information will enable the Ministry of Health with its partners, to develop interventions to combat and control the sickle cell burden in the country.

The Ministry of Health with its partners are planning to disseminate results of this survey and launch routine neonatal sickle cell screening in all high burden districts in Uganda. The function will be conducted on the 16<sup>th</sup> of April 2015 at Makerere University Freedom Square from 11:00am to 4:00pm. Besides the launch of the routine neonatal screening program, there will be free screening for whoever will wish to be tested at the launch site.

As a key stakeholder and social mobilizer, this communication serves to notify you of the advent of this important service and ask you to partner with us to mobilize the masses to attend this important function. You must have already noted the negative impact sickle cell has on the life of individuals and families that are affected. Being a genetic disease, sickle cell is not curable, but it is preventable. If testing and counseling is provided to individuals before marriage, we can drastically reduce the incidence of sickle cell disease in Uganda. Before, we did not have capacity for screening, but has now been made available at CPHL. You are requested to mobilize the masses not only to attend this function, but also take advantage of the national laboratory capacity, that has been created for routine neonatal sickle cell screening. Together we can reduce the incidence of sickle cell disease in this country. This is the only chance we have to galvanize support to be able to manage and control sickle cell and lessen its impact on the health of its victims. Encourage masses to attend and also take a free screening test that will be provided at the function.

Thank you for your usual cooperation.

  
Dr. Alex Opio

**FOR: DIRECTOR GENERAL HEALTH SERVICES**

- CC: Hon. Minister of Health
- C.C. Hon. Minister of State for Health (PCH)
- C.C. Hon. Minister of State for Health (General Duties)
- C.C. Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Health
- C.C. Director General Health Services
- C.C. Director Health Services (Clinical & Community)