

## “TOGETHER WE CAN END TUBERCULOSIS (TB) AND LEPROSY”

### Preamble

#### Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We greet you in the name of God Almighty from the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, the body that unites all religious leaders and faith communities to address matters of common concern to all of us. Today, as we commit to ensure the well-being of Ugandans free of all diseases, tuberculosis, a disease which mainly affects the lungs, continues to affect many Ugandans. Leprosy is another disease that continues to affect our people in some parts of the country. Leprosy affects the skin, face, and nerves and can cause deformities/disability in the eyes, hands and feet. These diseases are spread the same way through the air when someone with the disease is coughing, sneezing, talking, and laughing.

**Quran: “Worship Allah and associate nothing with Him, and to parents do good, and to relatives, orphans, the needy, the near neighbor, the neighbor farther away, the companion at your side, the traveler, and those whom your right hand possess. Indeed, Allah does not like those who are self-deluding and boastful.”-The Holy Quran 4:36**

#### Our concerns;

The Ministry of Health tells us that over 30 people lose their lives to TB every day. While TB is preventable and curable, it remains one of the leading causes of death in our country. The age group of 15-54 is the most affected by TB. TB also occurs more commonly among men than women. We are concerned that patients with TB lose their income due to being sick for a prolonged period, transport-related costs and feeding requirements. Children are equally affected as they are unable to attend school.

Although TB services are free of charge in Uganda, 53% of families with tuberculosis patients lose over 20% of their annual income on seeking TB care.

Families/communities with TB may find themselves in a vicious cycle of poverty. Up to 33% of the people estimated to have the disease are diagnosed are freely living in our communities, thus continue to spread the TB through coughing and sneezing. Each undiagnosed TB patient transmits the disease to 10-15 other people per year.

Over the last five years, 1,633 cases of leprosy have been treated and a quarter of them present with visible disability. This implies that such people presented for treatment late and continue to spread the disease to members of the community.

Fellow Ugandans, TB and Leprosy still exist in Uganda yet most of us continue to hold the view that TB and Leprosy no longer exist largely due to our low-risk perception and complacency.

### Our message and call to action

Brothers and sisters, TB and Leprosy are preventable and curable diseases. Our country has made tremendous progress in addressing the two diseases led by the Ministry of Health. Treatment of TB and Leprosy is free in Uganda!

As your leaders, we call upon all of you to heed the advice and call from the Ministry of Health and partners as we mount a campaign to jointly end TB and Leprosy in Uganda. Brothers and sisters, we are all called to bear witness to the harsh reality that without comprehensively addressing these challenges, all of us will suffer illness and death. We, therefore, call upon the public to be vigilant and support all those that present signs and symptoms related to TB and leprosy to access services by a health professional.

As faith-based communities, our role should be to break the stigma and myths surrounding TB. Let's support patients with TB by showing love and compassion. TB and Leprosy are not caused by witchcraft.

Finally, let us pray for God's help to refrain from offering words against those affected by TB and leprosy to end stigma. Let us pray for God's help to encourage one another with words and actions which offer solace that alleviates our shared pain, brings hope and healing to our people

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