

# **3<sup>rd</sup> UGANDA ALCOHOL POLICY CONFERENCE KAMPALA, UGANDA**

## **(UAPC22)**

### Building Momentum for Control of Alcohol Harm in Uganda: Walking the Talk

25<sup>th</sup> November 2022

Distinguished Guests, Organisers, ladies and gentlemen

I take the pleasure to read to you the statement from Uganda Alcohol Policy Conference 2022.

#### ***Preamble***

*From the 23<sup>rd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> of November 2022, the Uganda Alcohol Policy Alliance in partnership with the Ministry of Health, World Health Organisation, and Makerere University School of Public Health hosted the third Uganda Alcohol Policy Conference (UAPC22) at Imperial Royale Hotel, Kampala. UAPC was initiated to address an information gap where evidence on alcohol harm can be widely disseminated and for translated for policy action.*

*UAPC22 was successfully conducted, with virtual and physical participation of 254 participants from 13 countries including Uganda, Burundi, Kenya, South Africa, the United States of America, Norway, Tanzania, Sweden, Sri Lanka, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia, and Slovakia. Participants included representatives of Young people, Officials from various government departments, Civil Society Organizations, Researchers, Development partners, Practitioners, Professionals, media, and Members of Parliament. The Conference was officially opened by the Minister of State for Primary Health Care Hon Margaret Muhanga, and the World Health Organisation Country representative Dr. Yonas Tegegn Woldemariam. The event was also attended by the President of Movendi International and Eight Members of Parliament.*

## CONFERENCE STATEMENT

We the participants of UAPC22,

Having discussed alcohol harm, its burden, drivers, and the social-cultural facilitators and limitations for existing prevention measures,

Note that alcohol consumption rates in Uganda are unacceptably higher than Africa and World averages. The growing use of alcohol among women and the high Heavy Episodic Drinking among young people (who make the bulk of Uganda's population) is as well a major concern. Uganda's high alcohol consumption levels have resulted in avoidable deaths, diseases and other societal challenges including but not limited to child abuse, domestic violence, poverty, environmental destruction, poor academic performance and family breakups. The negative consequences of alcohol use impose a huge burden on the country's economy in form of lost revenue due to low productivity and high health costs which threaten the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals and retards Uganda's development and attainment of Vision 2040 **"A transformed Ugandan society from a peasant to a modern and prosperous country within 30 years"**.

In spite of the above alcohol-related challenges, we observe the increasing trends of the Alcohol industry's activities through misleading marketing of alcohol that targets women and young people. The current aggressive alcohol sales, promotions and marketing undermine and work against the government's efforts to reverse its negative consequences which further complicates awareness and prevention interventions. We note that the existing legal framework is weak and enforcement of alcohol prevention policies is inadequate.

We Recognize the important steps taken by the government of Uganda to prevent and reduce alcohol harm by controlling alcohol use in the recent

past. Such measures have included banning alcohol sachets, passing the National Alcohol Control Policy, and closure of bars and drinking spaces during the COVID-19 pandemic. We commend the efforts of local governments that have initiated measures to regulate alcohol use at subnational levels. We also recognize the alcohol prevention work by Non-Government players in mitigating the negative consequences of alcohol use in Uganda. Such efforts have started yielding dividends resulting in declining trends in alcohol consumption, especially among men and new young alcohol users.

To continue the downward trend of alcohol consumption in Uganda, and improve the populations wellbeing it is necessary to:

- Embrace the SAFER Intervention for the prevention of alcohol harm as recommended by the Ministry of Health to be an Evidence-based, High impact, and low-cost strategy
- Proactively engage the media as an important stakeholder in promoting alcohol awareness programs across the country.
- Monitor and prevent the interference of the alcohol industry in the policy-making processes
- Regularly revise the pricing and marketing policies.
- Encourage Government collaboration with Civil societies that are free of ties from the alcohol industry. Community, cultural, religious, and local leaders should be involved in the formulation of alcohol control regulations as a wide stakeholder engagement is a reliable strategy for ensuring future compliance.
- Pay attention to the gender-specific alcohol prevention and treatment programs with special focus on vulnerable groups including young people (in and out of School), refugees, and those in correctional facilities.
- Support the enforcement and regulatory measures and fast-track the Alcohol Control Bill into a National Law. In the absence of modern

alcohol law, local governments should be encouraged to set up ordinances and by-laws to reduce alcohol availability at the grass root.

- Increase funding for programs for research, prevention, treatment, and policy monitoring activities that are geared toward preventing and reducing alcohol harm such as.
- Promote initiatives for early detection and treatment of Alcohol Use Disorders, standardize and regulate the respective services.

Together for a SAFER Uganda free from alcohol harm