**CONCEPT NOTE ON THE ‘REMAIN VIGILANT AGAINST COVID’ RUN**

**BACKGROUND**

In his address to the nation on 28th October 2021, President Yoweri Museveni announced that Uganda would fully reopen the economy in January 2022 after almost two years of restrictions aimed at containing the spread of Covid-19. He said it was expected that by then, half of the targeted population would have been vaccinated. In another address on 20th November 2021, President Museveni reiterated the same position that the restrictions would be fully lifted, schools would reopen and the lockdowns and curfews will be no more.

Uganda, just like all other countries of the world has battled the Covid-19 pandemic since 2019. According to the Ministry of Health statistics of 28th November 2021, a total of 3,239 people died of Covid-19 and 126,965 were confirmed cases of Covid-19 out of the 1,882,780 tested samples. The good news is that cumulative recoveries were 97,025. Preventive measures have also been in place since the corona virus was first detected in Uganda. Government has emphasised use of masks especially when out in public or caring for patients, social and physical distancing, quarantining, adequate ventilation and aeration of indoor spaces while minimising air conditioning, covering the mouth while coughing or sneezing, desisting from touching the eyes, nose and mouth, hand washing and/or sanitising.

Since the President also emphasised the importance of vaccination to the reopening; and campaigns have been on in earnest to get as many Ugandans in the target groups as possible to take the vaccine, the Ministry has reported that a total of 4,835,777 people in Uganda have so far been vaccinated. The Uganda Government is making the vaccines, mainly AstraZeneca, Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson, available free of charge.

As Ugandans gear up for the full opening of the economy, the nation must be on the alert for its people not to put their guard down and cause what several countries in Europe and the United States are experiencing -- a surge in infections after re-opening. Some have been forced to re-impose restrictions including locking down again. With the rising cases of Covid-19, Austria, Germany, and Portugal, are looking at imposing new restrictions. Most countries had imposed strict national lockdowns at the beginning of the pandemic except Sweden. Health experts believe that there have been positive developments in managing the pandemic from testing, therapeutics and vaccines so total lockdowns which devastated economies, disrupted education and caused mental health issues may not be necessary any more, provided the people do not abandon the preventive measures.

The experience of New South Wales, which is Australia’s most populous state is quite instructive as it defied this pattern and had no rising cases after easing restrictions. This has been attributed to “a combination of an impressive and rapid vaccine uptake, together with mask mandates, contact tracing and isolation requirements as well as vaccination entry permits”. The ability of New South Wales to vaccinate huge numbers of its population ensured that when lockdown was lifted, immunity levels were high. However, the magic was in strictly maintaining key public health measures even after restrictions eased. Health authorities continued to enforce the wearing of masks in public places while maintaining contact tracing and isolation requirements in order to curb the spread of the Covid-19.

Uganda needs to pick a lesson from these experiences around the world concerning the full reopening of the country economy. It is important that the government launches a sustained campaign to raise the people’s consciousness to appreciate that the full reopening of the economy does not mean that the situation has completely normalised. Ugandans are excited that they will return to their livelihoods, their entertainment and leisure activities and free movement at any time of the day or night. They must understand that the responsibility to keep the masks on, wash or sanitise hands regularly, avoid crowded places, keep social distance and get fully vaccinated, may just be what it takes to protect the country from re-imposing the restrictions.

**Proposed activities and objectives**

In view of the aforegoing, the Public Relations Office in the Office of the President is proposing to organise a **REMAN VIGILANT AGAINST COVID** runto raise awareness and consciousness of Ugandans about the need to remain vigilant and comply with the public health SOPs after the economy is reopened in order to prevent a surge in the spread of covid-19. The REMAIN VIGILANT AGAINST COVID run will be held under the theme: ‘**It is my responsibility to prevent the surge of Covid-19 infections when the economy reopens’** will be held in collaboration with the Office of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Education and Sports, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of ICT and National Guidance, the media and other government MDAs and private corporate entities…..

The specific objectives of the run will be to:

1. Raise the consciousness of the people to the need to remain vigilant in the fight against the spread of Covid-19 when the economy reopens.
2. Raise awareness about the imperative need to strictly maintain the SOPs.
3. Trigger the people’s mindfulness to fulfil their individual duty for the common good.
4. Enhance the collaboration of the Government and other stakeholders in the fight against covid-19.
5. Raise funds for ……..(increasing availability of vaccines or sustain a campaign on remaining vigilant) etc?

The mini-marathon, scheduled for ………December 2021 will start from Kololo Independence Grounds and end at the same place. It will be graced by Uganda’s international athletics stars the golden men Joshua Cheptegei, James Kiplimo and the golden girl Peruth Chemutai. Uganda’s historic female rower Grace Kathleen Noble as well as various other local athletes will be invited. In compliance with the existing guidelines, the participants will not exceed 200 people.

**Results**

1. Increased awareness of the citizen’s duty to ultimately prevent the surge in covid-19 infections following the full reopening of the economy.
2. Contribution to the national fight against Covid-19 through proceeds from the run (sale of the running kit and corporate sponsorship)

**Budget**

1. Running kit
2. Water and glucose
3. Security
4. Sports experts/trainers to manage the run
5. Flyers and posters
6. Advertising and popularising the run
7. Media coverage during the run
8. Medals and Prizes