



PRESS STATEMENT

BY

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MINISTER OF STATE FOR DISABILITY AFFAIRS

**ON THE OCCASION TO MARK THE INTERNATIONAL  
WHITE CANE DAY**

**DATE: 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2024**

**THEME: A WHITE CANE FOR EVERY BLIND",**

**VENUE: MEDIA CENTRE, KAMPALA**

- The Hon members of Parliament Present
- The community of Persons with visual impairment in Uganda
- Members of the Media Fraternity
- And the Nation at large

Good morning to you all,

On behalf of the Government of Uganda and on my own behalf, I join the Uganda's community of Persons with Visual impairment, as we celebrate the International White Cane Day. This day is normally observed on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October every year, but for this year, the event will be celebrated on 17<sup>th</sup> of November 2024.

The UN Global theme for this year is "Promoting inclusion: Celebrating abilities and advocating for access to People with Blindness". As a country we have domesticated the theme and our national theme for this year is "**A White Cane for Every Blind Person**".

The theme highlights the need for commitment to create a more safe and inclusive environment for every Ugandan, including Persons with visual impairment. The theme also calls upon Ugandans to prioritize meaningful inclusion of the community of Persons with visual impairment in the social, economic, political and other aspects of development, through all forms of accessibility, but with special emphasis on accessibility using a white cane.

Fellow Ugandans, the key highlight of this year's event is a **MARATHON**, code named "**RUN FOR THE BLIND**".

The commemoration is aimed at raising awareness on the rights and mobility needs of persons with visual impairment so as to break the accessibility barriers. This year's event is special, in that, we want the public to walk the talk of supporting mobility , in form of a fundraising drive to raise **10,000 white canes** for Persons with Blindness.

Fellow country men and women, many Persons with Blindness are not able to access services such as education, health, banks, recreation centers , courts, transport systems, economic empowerment services, among others due to physical accessibility and mobility challenges. Globally, white canes are the well known devices for empowering People with blindness to access different services, and service delivery points.

Apart from a guide to a Person with blindness, White canes are the sure way towards independent living of a Person with Blindness. A white cane is a form of mobility aid that enable a Person with Blindness to go about their daily business especially in unfamiliar environments, without a guide.

The major types of canes, differentiated according to utilization, include: long cane, symbol cane, guide cane and one with red stripes.

- The long cane is the standard long white cane, which folds into four or more sections. It is for a set of length for the user and requires some basic training for effective utilization.
- Symbol cane is on the other hand short and not designed to touch the ground, because its function is just to illustrate someone's sight loss. These are commonly used in busy areas or at road crossing points to indicate the sight loss.
- Guide cane is in between the two above in terms of length. It's majorly used to detect obstacles when in unfamiliar environment.
- A white cane with red strips: This type of cane in most cases has two red stripes. It's designed to indicate a dual-disability, for example hearing loss in addition to sight loss.

According to the World Health Organization, at least 2.2 billion people across the world have a near or distance visual impairment. In Africa, approximately 26.3 million people have some form of visual impairment. Of these, 20.4 million have low vision and 5.9 million are blind.

Here in Uganda, the UBOS report of 2014 indicated that out of 6.4 million Persons with Disabilities, 2.1 million are persons with visual impairment constituting 33.2% of the disability community.

Given the above huge population of Persons with Visual impairment in need of meaningful inclusion, ensuring access to socio-economic services for persons with visual impairment is essential and an obligation to all of us.

Fellow country men and women, there are national and international instruments such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), AU Protocol and the Marrakesh Treaty, to which Uganda is a signatory. This makes it mandatory for the government and partners to ensure that we all work towards fulfilling these obligations.

Government of Uganda has taken bold steps in disability inclusion, and has also ratified and put in place policy frameworks and programmes such as:

- i) Strong legal framework: Uganda was among the first countries to ratify the CRPD as well as amend and review its Persons with Disabilities Act and National Policy, among other frameworks, to align them with the UN CRPD.
- ii) This year, Uganda was recognized by AU secretariat, as one of the first 15 countries in Africa to ratify the African Union Protocol on the rights of Persons with Disabilities.

- iii) In the area of education, the Country has established 37 special primary schools and 20 secondary schools for children with visual impairments.
- iv) According to Ministry of Education and Sports' Management Information System (EMIS); as at end of 2013, we had 6,249 children with visual impairments enrolled in pre-primary school, 36,792 in primary school and 3,709 in secondary school.
- v) Government has instituted special quotas for admission of students with disabilities (including persons with visual impairments) in public universities. Under this programme, many students with disabilities are admitted for various courses annually. Besides, the 64 students under direct affirmative action, we have many through master card foundation, and others, estimated at 220 per year.
- vi) Uganda has promoted non-discrimination of Persons with Disabilities in employment, and I am proud to report that for the first time, we now have a magistrate with visual impairment in addition to a number of other officers in Ministries, Departments and Agencies.

Ladies and Gentlemen, We need to know that persons with visual impairment need white canes not just as a symbol of autonomy, but also to enable them navigate their environments for safety, detecting obstacles and changes in terrain, while promoting confidence in their daily activities.

I would like to take this opportunity therefore, to invite all Ugandans to this year's events marking the white cane day, which will include a run codenamed **#run for the blind#**.

Ladies and Gentlemen, for registration and participation in this noble cause, we should use MTN MoMo Code **710075** (Dial \*165\*3#) OR Airtel Pay Code **4370414** (Dial \*185\*9#) and then follow the prompts to buy a running kit at only **UGX 25,000**. The kits can also be collected or purchased from different places that will be clarified later by UNAB leadership.

For Donations through the bank, please use **UBA Bank A/C 0103017389** in the names of Uganda National Association of the Blind.

This Marathon will be launched by the Rt. Hon. Speaker of Parliament of Uganda Hon. Anita Among, as the Chief Runner on

17th November 2024 at Kati Kati Grounds, Lugogo, starting at 6.00am.

Then the closing ceremony is expected to be presided over by the Rt. Hon. Right Prime Minister Robinah Nabbanja as the Chief Guest, at 10:00am, same day and at the same venue.

All the proceeds from the run will go towards purchasing of the 10,000 whites canes that I talked about earlier for the Children, youths and women with visual impairment.

Together, we can fundraise for a white cane for every Blind Person. See you all at KatiKati on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2024.

I thank you.

**For God and my country**