

Dear honourable MP, do not forget the girl child

Congratulations on your election to Parliament. Your victory reflects the trust and hope that Ugandans placed in you during the recently concluded polls. Manifestos and campaign speeches promised progress and representation. As you prepare to assume office, the responsibility to translate those promises into action begins.

As you structure budgets and draw up plans for your term of service, I urge you not to forget women and the girl child. Women participated fully in the civic duty of voting, hopeful that their struggles, dreams, and aspirations would finally receive sustained attention in Parliament.

Education remains one of the most urgent challenges. The Uganda Bureau of Statistics Gender Statistics Report 2023/2024 shows that 22.7 percent of females in Uganda have no formal education, while only 5.2 percent pursue education beyond secondary school. Ten percent of girls drop out of school due to pregnancy. Government initiatives such as Universal Primary Education, Universal Secondary Education, the 1:5 admission points scheme, and the district quota system were introduced to bridge inequality.

Yet awareness and access remain limited, particularly in rural areas which many Members of Parliament represent. Girls continue to miss school due to poverty, lack of sanitary wear, and poor learning environ-

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Girl-child

ments. Access to education must be free, fair, and of good quality. Provision of reusable sanitary pads and improved school facilities should be prioritised to ensure girls remain in school.

Early marriage remains a serious concern. Today, it often takes the form of grooming and sugar daddy arrangements, which frequently result in teenage pregnancy and forced or coerced marriages. These practices deny girls their childhood, compromise their health, and prematurely end their education. Stronger enforcement of existing laws, coupled with sustained community sensitisation is urgently needed.

Equal access to opportunities also remains elusive. Deep rooted attitudes continue to limit acceptance of women as leaders, especially in traditionally male dominated roles.

Evidence shows that many still struggle to accept that women possess equal leadership ability. Members of Parliament can lead by example by ensuring women are consistently included in advisory teams, decision making spaces, and policy formulation processes.

Domestic violence demands urgent attention. The 2024 Annual Crime Report indicates that 75 percent of domestic violence victims are women and girls. Sexual offences, including rape and defilement, remain widespread. Harmful attitudes that blame survivors must be actively challenged. Parliamentarians should advocate for the establishment of women's shelters, strengthen women affairs leadership at the grassroots, and work closely with civil society organisations so survivors feel safe reporting abuse and seeking justice.

Women's economic empowerment is equally important. Many women lack information and support to access government programmes such as the Parish Development Model, SAGE, UWEF, and the Youth Livelihood Programme. Bridging knowledge gaps and improving access to these initiatives can transform households and communities.

As our representatives in the August House, your debates and decisions shape lives. Bills such as the Sexual Offences Bill and the Marriage Bill await your considered input. As you discharge your duties, keep the interests of women and the girl child firmly in mind.

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