Rotary International spearheads fundraising for bone marrow transplant centre

BY STEPHEN OTAGE

WAKISO: Rotary International has accepted to take leadership in fundraising for money for Uganda to construct its first bone marrow transplant unit at the Joint Clinical Research Centre, Wakiso District.

Speaking at the launch of the fundraising drive for the Lubowa-based facility at the weekend, Rotary International President Francisco Arezzo commended the approach Uganda plans to use to mobilise funds and other resources to build the unit.

He noted that the Ugandan government is partnering with the community, corporate institutions, individuals and international partners to raise money for an important public facility like the bone marrow transplant unit, which is the easiest way for the Rotary Foundation to approve global grants to such causes.

"This is the best way for us to present a global grant. I am so happy to see what this facility is contributing for the country. Rotary is part of the community and a global grant a grant will be approved. Banks, insurance companies have contributed to this project. I am happy that the community is contributing to the Rotary project," he said.

Dr Cissy Kityo Mutuuluza, the Executive Director of JCRC, said President Museveni officiated at the ground breaking ceremony for the facility on October 23, 2023. She noted that bone marrow transplant, which is also known as cell therapy, is used in the cure of several diseases including HIV/Aids.

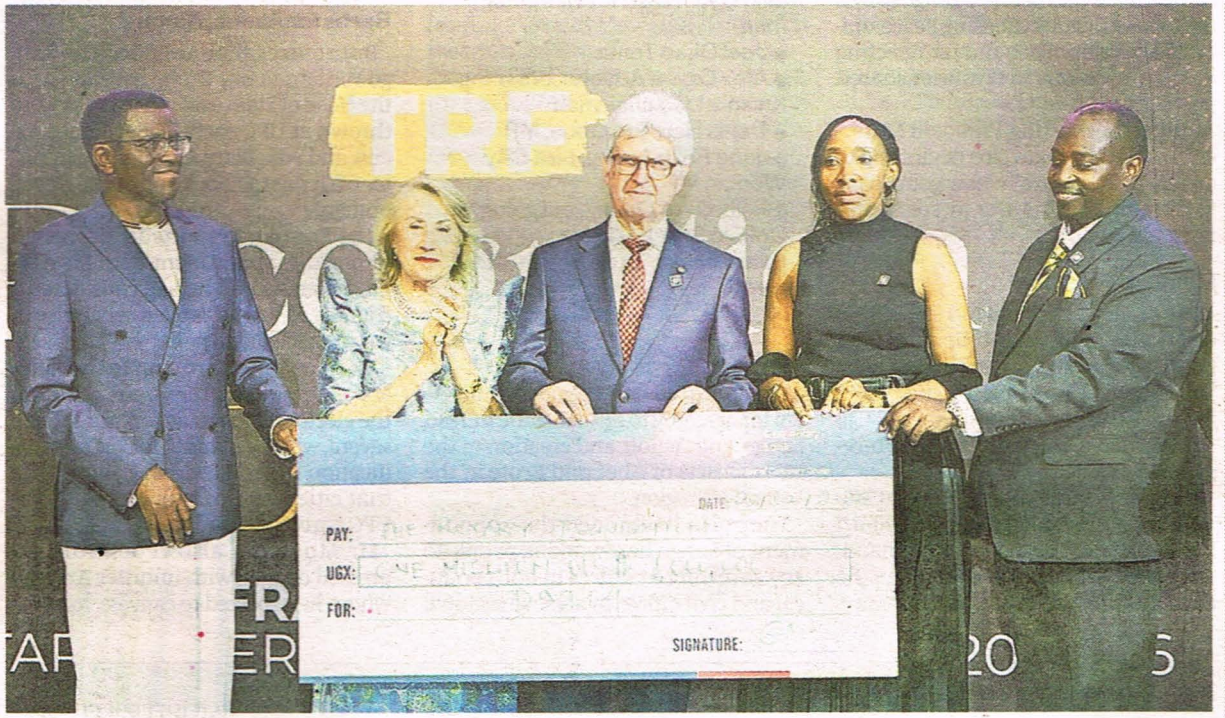
"Bone marrow transplant can cure several diseases. We have nine patients who have cured from HIV/Aids because of bone marrow transplant. Over 32 people have been trained and we shall have additional training from some of the money [collected]," she said.

Asked how much money is needed to put up the facility and how much they have so far collected, she said they need $4 million (Shs14.29 billion) to get the facility started and so far they have received $1.34 million (Shs4.78 billion), which has catered to the initial set up.

Dr Ruth Aceng, the Health minister, said when the facility is available, post-transplant care within the country for any organ becomes easier and government is planning to have another at the Uganda cancer Institute to handle conditions that require bone marrow transplant. She explained that currently, one percent of the Ugandan population suffers from Sickle cell disease and 20,000 children are born with the disease annually, necessitating the need for bone marrow transplant for eligible individuals.

Last Friday, Rotary International President Francesco Arezzo and his wife Ann Marai Criscione Arezzo flew into the country for a two-day working visit that saw him visit signature Rotary projects in Kawempe Hospital, Makerere University Peace Centre, Uganda Blood Transfusion Services in Nakasero, and a Polio immunisation programme at Jyanhyi Health Centre. He also launched a mega biannual free health camp at the National Medical Stores in Kajjansi, Wakiso District.

During his visit, Mr Arezzo also met Rotaractors at Lweza Training Centre and had a couple of dinners hosted for him. He noted that Rotary in Uganda is very vibrant, commending the district's $1.9 million (Shs6.78 billion) contribution to the Rotary Foundation, the global funding arm of Rotary International's sustainability humanity projects, at the close of his visit.



Rotary International President Francisco Arezzo (centre) and his wife (second left) are joined by Buganda prime minister Charles Peter Mayiga (right) and Rotary District 9214 Governor Christine Kawooya Kyeyune to receive a dummy cheque of $1m to Rotary Foundation from District 9214 in Muyenga, Kampala City, last Friday. PHOTO/STEPHEN OTAGE

$4m
COST OF SETTING UP CENTRE