

SPEECH OF PROF. J.T. KAIMENYI – *Eminent Dentist and Cabinet Secretary for Ministry of Lands, housing and Urban Development – Date 23/3/2016 during the Oral Health Summit, Radisson Blue – Nairobi.*

The CS – Health Dr. C. Mailu – Represented by the Deputy Director of Medical Services

Director – Columbia Global Centres Africa – Dr. Belay Begashow

Social Mission Director – Unilever Dr. Mynam Sidibe

Invited guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am indeed very delighted to participate in this Oral Health Summit whose theme is “Integrating Oral Health and Health” It also gives me great pleasure to note the conveners for this event are drawn from both academic institutions and private partners.

The agenda which has been discussed over this two-day event is very crucial for the progress of oral health in our region. It should be embraced by our governments and especially Kenya, as it promises to fulfill the mandate set out by chapter 6 , the bill of rights of the Kenyan Constitution -- “every citizen has a right to highest standards of healthcare”. Oral health forms an integral part of general health; General health cannot therefore be achieved without the attainment of good oral health.

The training of oral health professionals in Kenya has a brief history of just over 40 years. To date, the medical practitioners and Dentists board has registered about 1,000 dentists; this comprising both locally and foreign trained dentists, and including those who may have migrated to practice elsewhere.

In Kenya, the dentist population ratio currently stands at 1:42,000 – against the WHO – recommendation for 1:7,000. If you compare this to 1:2,000 achieved by some developed countries, the pain that Kenyan population may be going through due to oral challenges will seem real. In an effort to increase preventive services for oral disease, a presidential decree of 1984 established training for

Community Oral Health Officers. This cadre of para-dental staff was later to be deployed to work with dentists to alleviate pain from dental diseases while at the same time offering oral health promotion services. To date, about 1,000 Community Oral Health Officers have been trained, although the government had only engaged about 125 of them as at 2013 when Health services were devolved to the counties. Even with these numbers of dentists, there is a very serious inequality in the distribution of oral health personnel between rural and urban regions. About 80% of dentists are located in major urban centres, serving just about 20% of the population.

Oral diseases: The burden of oral diseases continues to increase. Recent survey indicates about 5 out of every 10 children aged 5 years suffer tooth decay. The health of their gums is at an even more worrying condition. Almost all children (99.6%) and adults (98%) suffer from bleeding gums, a condition that can be prevented with minimal investment in terms of oral health promotion activities. While academic institutions may provide the evidence for best practices, it is upon all stakeholders to get together and ensure such evidence is embedded in policies that can make a change to the oral health of the population. Prevention of oral diseases is not a preserve of the oral health care professionals only;

wide engagement of stakeholders is important for such activities to ensure

- ✚ Safe drinking water – It is morally wrong to watch 40% of our children have poor smiles due to dental fluorosis
- ✚ Oral health literacy levels are still very low; there is need to invest in programs to change this
- ✚ The two common dental diseases- Tooth Decay and Gum disease – are preventable
- ✚ Enforcement of regulations to reduce Road-Traffic Accidents (Especially Boda bodas)

- ✚ Oral health is a vital component in the management regimes of vulnerable groups like Persons living with HIV/AIDS
- ✚ Programs to reduce uptake of Tobacco, and cessation are spread across the country, together with investment in appropriate technologies to manage oral cancer (The five year survival rates have not changed for decades)

Prevention is better than cure; I would urge both the national and county governments to take bold steps in investing in prevention and oral health promotion as the country will reap fruits if this approach is adopted.

I look forward to a Kenya, East African Region where oral health of the people takes centre stage; and that's my prayer for our people

Thank you