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A Call to Re-Open Schools and Places of Worship Alliance for National Transformation (ANT) Proposal

ATT: The President, Speaker of Parliament of Uganda, Minister of Education.

Background

The lifting of the lockdown a few days ago exposed the NRM Government's ill preparedness before, during, and after lockdown. The President had no plan whatsoever for the re-opening of learning institutions, no plan for an economic stimulus package, no clear articulation of how the health sector had been revamped during the lockdown. As if that is not bad enough, our children's future is also now hangs in the air as schools remain closed. The President also seems angry with God and decided to keep God's houses under lock and key. We call for the immediate opening of places of worship.

The Alliance for National Transformation (ANT) calls for an immediate re-opening of learning institutions and places of worship.

The ANT school re-opening proposal has the following objectives:

- 1) To re-open learning institutions within the SOP regime.
- 2) To rescue the school going children from an impending human resource destruction.
- 3) To re-open learning institutions in a cost effective and an almost no additional cost.

- 4) To ensure comprehensive syllabus coverage within the specified and available time.
- 5) To tap into community resources for learning during the pandemic.
- 6) To unclog the education pipeline.
- 7) To introduce innovative and simple approaches to education during Covid19.
- 8) Ultimately save the country from the looming human disaster.

We offer the following ideas and assurances:

- 1) Teaching and learning have an age factor in the formative stages. To waste that age bracket is to lose that generation for good. Continued closure of schools portends a loss of an entire generation.
- 2) Concerning Covid-19, children are not the most affected age group locally and internationally. {For example, in the USA 1.3% of children with a known case of COVID-19 have been hospitalized and 0.01% have died.}
- 3) UNICEF and UNESCO have already called for the re-opening of schools. What further guidance is the Government of Uganda waiting for?
- 4) Tertiary or university learners are adults who can follow SOPs. Whether institutions are open or not they are out in the public already interacting with the world.
- 5) The proposal to wait until all children are vaccinated is farfetched and diversionary, largely owing to vaccine unavailability and specific vaccine development for children. If medical workers have not been fully vaccinated up to now, how can anyone imagine that our children will get the vaccine in time, without losing irredeemable schooltime?
- 6) Other countries across the world, including the East African Community have their schools open. Perhaps Uganda could learn from what those countries are doing right to enable children continue

with their educational development. {In Kenya, schools have converted libraries, dining halls, assembly grounds, and shaded spots under trees into temporary classrooms.}

- 7) Now is a good time for medical students at all levels and all science students at all levels to be learning how to fight pandemics and not be hiding from it.

THE ANT proposes the following practical solutions.

- 1) An immediate resumption for all Candidate classes and Senior One Classes of 2020 country wide within August 2021. Experience has shown that the last time this was done, not much harm or spread was occasioned.
- 2) All final year students in all tertiary institutions should resume studies within August 2021.
- 3) Instead of waiting for vaccination for all the school children, Government should increase testing availability and accessibility and community surveillance.
- 4) Enhanced inspection and monitoring of schools whereby VHTs, Parent Association leaders, LCs and volunteers are mandated to monitor observance of SOPs in Schools.
- 5) There should be a full re-opening in September for the entire education sector, and work with the following recommended methods:
 - a. Adopting the shift system to create a fast-tracking arrangement and reduce congestion.
 - b. Take on Saturday as an official learning day for a season of catch up.
 - c. Syllabus compression for Primary and Secondary Schools.
 - d. Hybrid learning where those who can learn online at home be allowed to register for final UNEB exams and those that can be in class have the opportunity prepare at school.

- e. Adoption of a two-season exam calendar by UNEB for all levels, one for May and another for December.
- f. A recall of retired teachers who are still strong and able to bolster manpower needs for class teaching and school inspection.
- g. University and tertiary intakes should also be done at least twice a year.
- h. Innovatively expand learning spaces without building new schools, and here, an appeal can be made to churches, mosques or the Muslim community, and community centres etc to donate their spaces to be used for teaching and learning during the week.
- i. Institute a tracking and re-absorption mechanism for learners who may have already dropped out, gotten pregnant, or lost interest altogether.

6) In the 2021 – 2022 Budget, the Human Capital Development Sector where Education lies, was allocated 20.4% of the National Budget. So what is that money doing when schools are closed?

Covid19 will be here for a long time, and we must revolutionize our systems to cope.

Lastly, this proposal is urgent and comes in good faith. We urge Government also to call for position papers from experts to help in the re-opening of schools. Time is of the essence.

CIRCULATION:

1. The Parliamentary Committee of Education
2. Ministry of Education and Sports
3. The Media.