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By John Agaba

Dr. Charles Kiggundu, the president of the Association of Gynaecologists and Obstetricians of Uganda, has called for promotion of safe abortion in the country even if the move means legalizing the 'vice'.

Every year, **about 1,500 girls in Uganda die from complications resulting from unsafe abortion** contributing to the slow progress in reducing the over 16 women who die every day in pregnancy-related complications.

"We need to give women choice. If they are not ready for a pregnancy, they should be helped instead of leaving them to perform unsafe abortions and end up dying," Kiggundu said.

He was speaking at the national dialogue on economic, social and cultural rights organized by the Center for Health, Human Rights and Development (CEHURD) at Makerere University.

The dialogue sought to explore ways of improving access to economic, social and cultural rights in Uganda.

Haemorrhage (excessive bleeding) and Sepsis (infection) are the leading causes of pregnancy-related deaths of women accounting for 26% and 22% of maternal deaths respectively.

But 2008 Ministry of Health statistics estimated that abortion-related causes account for 26% of maternal deaths in the country.

"We cannot look at only bleeding, infections, malaria and HIV and expect to meet the Millennium Development Goal target to reduce maternal deaths by 75% by 2015 when abortion accounts for a

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third of maternal deaths,” Dr Collins Tusingwire, the Ministry of Health Assistant Commissioner for Reproductive Health, said earlier this year at a meeting aimed at averting maternal deaths.

Over 900,000 of Uganda’s annual 2.2million pregnancies are unintended and unplanned. About 400,000 of these end up in abortion.

Kiggundu said: “I am a gynaecologist. I have seen many women suffer complications and die as a result of unsafe abortions. There are many beautiful women you see walking on streets. But some don’t have a uterus — all because of unsafe abortions.”

“They use all kinds of things, sharp sticks, pen covers to induce the abortion. Unfortunately, some of them end up bleeding to death. Why don’t we give them a choice? If a woman is already pregnant and they are not ready to have a baby, than allow them to go through this, provide them a safe way. Because the truth is girls are getting pregnant, women are getting pregnant,” Kiggundu said.

Flavia Kyomuhendo, a human rights student at Makerere University, said: “We cannot bury our heads in the sand like the ostrich and pretend that everything is okay. We have a problem. And we need solutions. Premarital sex is common in Uganda. Girls, aged 12 to 17, are having sex. And some of them get pregnant. And they don’t have anyone to turn to. The boys who have made them pregnant can’t be fathers. And, at times, women are raped. So, it is not just about the moral issue.”

Abortion in Uganda is legal and permissible when a pregnancy endangers a woman’s life or her physical and mental health. However, sections of the Penal Code make unlawful abortion criminal.

“This makes providers of service to fear. Nobody wants to be punished, so you do not touch,” Dr. Kiggundu said: “We need the law to be interpreted. We do not want to give a service and then end up in jail for 14 years.”

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Rita, Canberra • 12 hours ago

We need to work the problems of "girls aged 12 to 17", not kill their unborn children more 'safely'.

Dr. Charles Kiggundu recognizes serious problems; "The boys who have made them pregnant can't be fathers. And, at times, women are raped.". We need serious solutions to these problems --aborting innocent children no matter how safely is not going to provide a adequate solution to these problems. Boys need to be taught responsibility and their obligations to treat other human beings with respect.

Sadly, there is a tendency to prefer to decriminalize abortion than to properly criminalize sexual abuse and rape and so provide better enforcement of protective laws for under-age victims of sexual abuse and victims of rape.

In the light of women's most pressing needs, it is ludicrous that abortion advocates would rather give a poor young Kenyan girl a safe abortion than a safe pregnancy along with improved personal security, food security, basic health needs, a decent education, development assistance for her community and a good life for herself and her child.

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Rodney • 18 hours ago

I doubt the intelligence of Dr Kiggundu and Flavia Kyomuhendo. Are they sure that their own births was purely intended, planned for, with all parental readiness? I really wonder. Why deny the unborn child right to life?

Dr Kiggundu and Flavia Kyomuhendo are just getting American money to promote the evil vice instead of curbing it. Do they want to mean that when a vice like homicide is rampant it should be legalized? These agents of evil?

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