

Josephine Nabukenya Remarks

Children, HIV, and Health Rights – Wednesday, March 6, 2013

Audience:

7 Minutes

Thank You and Introduce Yourself

- Good afternoon. Thank you so much for having me today.
- My name is Josephine Nabukenya and I am an Ambassador for the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation.
- I am talking with you today from my home in Kampala, Uganda, where I am currently a student.

Equitable Treatment

- We're all here this afternoon because 30 years into the epidemic, children remain an afterthought in the fight against AIDS.
- There are more than 3.4 million children living with HIV around the world.
- I am one of them but am healthy and alive today because I had access to the lifesaving medications and services I needed to survive.
- I consider myself very lucky though. The truth is, the majority of children living with HIV – nearly 3/4s -- do not share in that good fortune.
- In fact, only 28 percent of HIV-positive children around the world have access to the treatment they need to survive, compared to the 57 percent of adults who receive treatment.
- As an HIV-positive woman and advocate, that number infuriates me. The need to prioritize children is long overdue. Let me tell you why.

My Story

- I discovered that I was HIV positive when I was 10 years old – I read something I wasn't supposed to and learned that my mother, father, sister, and I were all living with HIV.

- Up until then, I never understood why my family and I were always so sick. Although I was terrified of my status, it felt good to finally have an answer.
- Because we lived in Kampala, my family and I had little difficulty accessing the lifesaving medicines and treatment we needed. We also were able to meet other families like ours, joining support groups and finding ways to not only cope, but to thrive with our status.
- Without the medication and support we received, I'm not sure where my family or I would be today. Would we even be alive?
- Today, I am a hard-working student, writer, volunteer, and sister. My days are spent studying, speaking to my peers about HIV, hanging out with friends, and volunteering my time as an advocate.
- Without treatment, my reality would be entirely different.
- Without treatment, I wouldn't have had the opportunity to grow up and enjoy my wonderful family and two sisters.
- Without treatment, all of my hard work in school, my good grades, and my aspirations of going to University and becoming a journalist or lawyer wouldn't exist.
- Without treatment, I would not be able to support the community I serve as a volunteer, advocate, and peer counselor.
- Without treatment, I wouldn't be here today. My dreams of a future helping other children around the world like me would be over.

Treatment Matters

- Treatment for children matters. I know that because without treatment, without medicines, my life reality would be entirely different.
- When I think about that, I recognize that the majority of HIV-positive children are not as fortunate as me. Their dreams, potentials, and futures are just as exciting and important as my own. But every time an HIV-positive child cannot access the treatment she needs, those dreams and futures die.
- I told you earlier that only 28 percent of children living with HIV have access to the treatment they need. Every hour, 30 children die as a result of AIDS.

- It's heartbreaking and it's not right.

Thank You

- A long time ago, I struggled to believe that I could stay healthy enough to grow up and experience life as an adult. Today I can dream about things much bigger than my HIV-status, and I know I don't need to worry.
- But I do worry for those other children – those that don't have treatment -- and will continue to fight for them until they can dream like me.
- Join me in supporting equitable treatment for children living with AIDS. Together we can prioritize children in the fight against HIV, and make more dreams and futures a reality for millions.