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**Science, technology and innovation for sustainable urban development in a
post-pandemic world**

Statement submitted by

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Remarks by Hon. Monica Musenero at the “High-level panel on Science, Technology, and Innovation for Sustainable Urban Development in a post-Covid19 world”: 25th Session of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development

Your Excellences,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen

The COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc globally, but more so in Sub-Saharan Africa due to our pre-existing weak socioeconomic systems. In Uganda, empirical and anecdotal evidence suggests that the demographic worst hit by Covid19 has been urban youths. To expound, Uganda has the youngest age structure in the world, with 77% of the population under the age of 30, and a median age of 16 years. We also have one of the highest youth unemployment rates in Africa, standing at 13.3% pre-Covid19. Certainly, this was exacerbated by the pandemic, which mostly affected the semi-skilled and unskilled youths. Often, the practice has been for unemployed youths to migrate from rural areas (where they shun agriculture) to urban areas, where they work in informal service sector jobs like riding motorcycle taxis. Such jobs were severely impacted by the pandemic and many livelihoods were left in peril.

Yet, a common trait exists amongst all youths in Uganda: they are invariably passionate individuals, determined to fill unmet needs and deliver positive change for their communities. Cognizant of this fact, our government, led by my office, has embarked on interventions that will ensure access to decent work opportunities for all youths, with Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) as a central cog. To give some examples:

- First, we now have specific financial interventions that give seed capital or soft loans to individuals or groups of youths with innovations and businesses. We provide youths with technical advisory on formalization of businesses, intellectual property protection, marketing, and private sector fundraising. Particularly, we are interested in cottage industries that prioritize value addition in agroprocessing, textiles and garments,

wood, and metal works, to mention but a few, since these can provide catchment for semi-skilled and unskilled youths.

- Second and relatedly, we are setting up innovation parks and common user facilities in all major urban areas, where young people can incubate their innovations with insignificant overhead costs, toward commercialization of products.
- Third, we are also investing heavily in vertical and horizontal technology transfer and development, to ensure local content toward sustainability of innovations and businesses, with minimal disruptions from global supply chains.

I want to note that our young people are challenging our traditional approaches, and to us, youth-led innovation is the key to sustainable urban development in the post Covid19 era. As a case in point, throughout the pandemic, we saw the traction of e-health and ecommerce platforms founded by young people. Some of these have already attracted Government support, Support from Development partners as well as Foreign Direct Investment. For example, SafeBoda, previously a motorcycle taxi service was repurposed for home deliveries during the pandemic. Thousands of new jobs were created, and motorcycle taxis which were otherwise not allowed to carry passengers found an alternative and more viable application. This momentum must be harnessed.

Finally, collectively, our national policies must support and create an environment for youth-led innovation and businesses to thrive. For this to happen, we also need to foster originality of thought. This can be done by transforming our education systems to not only focus on rewarding experience but also innovation and creativity.

I thank you.

For God and My Country

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