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KEY NOTE ADDRESS BY TOM KABOS OGWANG DURING THE OCCASION TO MARK WORLD SOCIAL WORK DAY CELEBRATIONS FOR NORTHERN UGANDA HELD AT ALL SAINTS UNIVERSITY LANGO, LIRA CITY ON WEDNESDAY, 15TH MARCH 2023

The Guest of Honor and Vice Chancellor - ASUL

The President - NASWU

The General Secretary - NASWU

The Resident City Commissioner - Lira City

His Worship, The Mayor - Lira City

The Coordinator - NASWU (Northern Uganda Chapter)

Deans of Faculties/Lecturers present

Representatives of Organizations/Agencies/Learning Institutions,

Career Social Work Students/ASUL Students/Students from Sister Institutions,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am greatly honored and humbled to be invited by National Association of Social Workers in Uganda to be the Key Note Speaker today as we launch the celebrations to mark the World Social Work Day in Uganda starting with Northern Uganda and being hosted by the great and mighty All Saints University Lango. To God be the Glory!

I am a qualified Social Worker with Msc (Social Work) obtained from the prestigious Lund University, Sweden. I also have a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work and Social Administration from the Centre of Excellence in the Heart of Africa, Uganda Christian University – Mukono; a Diploma in Law from Law Development Centre – Kampala; a Diploma in Business Studies from Makerere University Business School, Nakawa. Currently, I am the Academic Registrar of All Saints University Lango. I am passionate about Gender and Children's wellbeing. I am also a Resilient Theorist.

Our dear Guest of Honor, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, the Theme for this year's World Social Work Day is ***"Respecting Diversity through Joint Social Action"*** and the Theme for Uganda is ***"Respecting Diversity through Joint Social Action - The Role of Social Workers"***

Mr. Guest of Honor and distinguished ladies and gentlemen, allow me tell you a short story of a blind old man of about 100 years who happened to be a widower in a village. He was

literally disowned by his children and grand children as well as the village folks whom they claimed he had outlived his usefulness and nothing good would come out of him apart from eating and wasting the little available resources. In other words, they considered him long dead! However, out of the many grandchildren that he had, only one grand-daughter who also happened to be a single mother decided to stand by and take care of the old man. Despite all the abuses from the village folks, this grand-daughter would lift the old man from his bed, bring him out to sun-bathe, gave him water to drink, provide him with porridge, take him warm water to bathe and later on take him back to the house and offer him a light meal every day!

One day, as luck would have it, a very unfortunate incident happened that shocked the whole village. As the grand-daughter was washing clothes in the compound after taking back the old man in the house, and had left the child unattended to but playing while crawling in the compound, a snake came and moved straight to the child! The child thought the snake was a play toy, caught the snake and held it! As the snake rolled over the child's hands and body, the mother saw it and screamed for help! Those around the village gathered to find out what had happened, and all they saw was the child literally holding and playing with a snake. As usual, everyone stood aside fearing for the worse with none providing a workable solution to the challenge.

When the old man heard of the noise in the compound, and especially the screaming of the grand-daughter, he called her into the house to find out what was going on. The young girl explained how the snake had coiled around the great grandchild with no one able to offer a solution! The old man immediately gave the following instructions:

a) Go to the drinking pot in the house, check under the pot and remove a toad that usually lies and croak under the pot;
b) Go to the compound and pick the flower from a tree
c) Immediately go near the child and when u get closer call on the child by its name;
d) Pay little attention to the snake;
e) Shake the flower in the face of the child;
f) The child will release the snake and come for the flower;
g) As the snake uncoils, throw the toad towards the snake…
h) Lift up the child and let the snake go after the toad!

Mr. Guest of Honor, Sir, in contextualizing the story as well as the theme, "Respecting Diversity through joint Social Action" there is need to draw a deeper analysis in the knowledge and skills in the following areas:

a) Understanding cultural humility as an approach to diversity;
b) Identifying and defining dimensions of diversity;
c) Appreciating the complexity of identity;
d) Identifying important cultural considerations for working within diverse communities;
e) Accepting people's differences but find common ground;
f) Learning something new from people that are different from us, and not to shut them down;
g) Making sure we give everyone a chance to share their opinion;
h) Avoid using stereotypes and recognizing and addressing our own biasness.

Ladies and gentlemen, it would be prudent for us to consider the ***differences in racial, ethnic, socio-economic, geographical, political and academic/professional backgrounds***.

In other words, people with different shades of opinion, backgrounds (degrees and social experience), religious beliefs, political beliefs, heritage, and life experience etc are diverse in nature and origin but should work together for the common good.

Therefore, a deeply interpersonal skill, respect to diversity can be considered as the understanding that human beings are equal participants in a common ethical world by virtue of their human status. Recognizing each individual's uniqueness and differences is key in defining and respecting individuals in their own right.

In other words, social workers should use empathy, reflection, and interpersonal skills to effectively engage diverse clients and constituencies. We should demonstrate high quality, evidence-informed engagement skills to address complex systems related to client or community needs in different fields of practice.

According to NASWU Code of Ethics, ***"Social workers shall demonstrate an appreciation of their own cultural identities and those of others."*** In other words, social workers should spend time learning about the cultures of the people they serve while being aware of the assumptions of their own cultural values.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, in order to be a successful Social Worker, one must recognize the importance of another persons' background. This critical lens impacts how a client sees and reacts to the world. Race, religious identity, gender identity and expression, physically challenged persons, educational attainment are just some of the key attributes and defining influences of good social work practice.

Therefore, embracing diversity through joint social action is important, as it increases the talent pool and brings new ideas, perspectives and skills to our workforce. Greater diversity means greater business vibrancy. In order to reflect this year's theme, it's important that we stress the importance of respect in diversity at our different workplaces and environment.

I therefore encourage each and every participant to this conference to respect individual differences and acknowledge that membership of a particular group doesn't mean everyone from that group has the same values, beliefs, rituals and needs. Let's encourage children, young men and women, adults, the disabled and the elderly to recognize and appreciate people for the things that make them unique and special.

In conclusion, our dear Guest of Honor, Ladies and Gentlemen, Martin Luther King Jr. once remarked that, *"if a man is called upon to be a street sweeper, he should sweep the streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well"*. In other words, if for one reason or the other, one is called upon to serve humanity but he/she is unable to do great things, let us at least from today, promise to do small things in a great way through joint social action as we commemorate the Regional World Social Work Day, 2023 for Northern Uganda at this great and mighty All Saints University Lango!

I say all this, In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

"For God and My Country"