



DIRECTORATE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

Press Release

African Union commemorates the “World Sight Day” with focus on glaucoma



Addis Ababa, 12 October 2017 – Did you know that about 90% of the world's visually impaired persons live in developing countries? On the global outlook, it is estimated that 285 million people are visually impaired worldwide, 39 million are blind and 240 million have low vision. These gloom statistics were highlighted during the commemoration of the 2017 World Sight Day. The African Union observed the day under the theme “making our vision count”, as it seeks to

raise awareness on glaucoma, as one of the leading causes of blindness.

Officiating at the commemoration event, the Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission H.E Amb. Kwesi Quartey regretted the impact of blindness and the undue suffering it causes to visually impaired persons as well as its impact on societies, through the rising numbers of people living with disabilities and the escalation of inequity and cycles of poverty, which increase the socio-economic vulnerabilities of nations.

In Africa, glaucoma remains a complex public health problem due to its high prevalence. That, compounded with the limited information and awareness of glaucoma as well as the lack of proper equipment and skilled staff to diagnose and offer efficient treatment on time, continues to hamper efforts to address the eye ailment. The number of ophthalmologists and ophthalmology training institutions are also inadequate.

The Deputy Chairperson however lauded efforts at the African Union Commission, where he appreciated the Medical and Health Services led by its director Dr. Kassama Yankuba for their self-motivated initiatives aimed at uplifting the health status of the African Union staff and other stakeholders. “I am confident in saying that we are on the right path to creating a continent that will meet the vision 2020 obligations, of a world in which no one is needlessly blind, and where those with unavoidable vision loss can



achieve their full potential”, he stated. Africa’s development framework, Agenda 2063 aspiration one, seeks the social and economic transformation of the continent partly focusing the well-being of its people for a healthy population.

The Medical and Health Services Directorate has embarked on a visual impairment screening exercise for the AU Commission staff, their dependents and staff at the member state embassies.

Glaucoma is an eye disease that cause progressive damage of the optic nerve. If left untreated, glaucoma can progress, sometimes without obvious symptoms to the patient, gradually worsening visual damage and may lead to blindness. Visual damage is mostly irreversible.

Medical and Health Services Director Dr. Kassama recommends that for proper eye care;

- People with eye problems should seek medical attention for early screening, examination and treatment.
- People with high pressure in their eyes (glaucoma) should regularly use their eye drops to avoid being blind.
- Children should be screened for poor vision by our ophthalmologist as early as possible.
- People with Diabetes Mellitus and Hypertension should have their eyes tested every six months to avoid complications.
- Those above the age of 40 years should have their eyes tested at least once a year.

World Sight Day is an annual day of awareness held on the second Thursday of October, to focus global attention on blindness and vision impairment.

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