Dr Frank Olivier Richards, Director, River Blindness Program, The Carter Center, Atlanta, USA
We should bare in mind that the main objective of JAF and APOC is to eliminate suffering which origins are found in sickness and poverty. ♦

Prof Mamoun Homeida, Khartoum, Sudan, Président du TCC
JAF 18 comes at an important time in the history of eliminating onchocerciasis. It is now clear that all partners, countries, donors and NGDOs are all a time to head towards eliminating onchocerciasis from Africa. The signs showed at JAF 18 is that we can do it together. The donors have expressed willingness to support the APOC Program and extend its life to 2025 and not to end at 2015 as previously planned.

The Joint Action Forum (JAF) of the African Program for Onchocerciasis Control (APOC) meeting held from the 11th to 13th December 2012 in Bujumbura, Burundi, ended with a positive note.

Closing the session, Dr Sabine Ntakarutimana, Minister of Public Health and fight against Aids and newly President of 18JAF repeated the will expressed by participants, the hope to free Africa from Onchocerciasis and other Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTD) by 2025.

In her speech, she had a thought for the most remote population, those at the end of the road. she wishes that partners and countries increase their financial contributions to permit APOC to fulfill its mission.

Finally, she expressed abundantly her gratitude to the organizers before wishing to all the participants, her best wishes for end of year feast and next year.

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The lanterns went off on the reflexion forum held in Bujumbura in connection with the fight against onchocerciasis and neglected tropical diseases in Africa. Nevertheless, pressure will be mounted on participants’ concern with various recommendations. Though, the conclusion and decision are yet to be made available, everybody will keep in mind the headlines of resolution taken just after the closure session.

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It is worth to recall that two joyful events were recorded. First, the symbolic gift from APOC to the newly elected President. Secondly, the technical consultative
committee handed a gift to the outgoing Director of APOC which is going on retirement. According to TCC president, Dr Paul-Samson Lusamba-Dikassa is rewarded for the quality of the work he has done as Director of APOC during his 20 months term of office.

They are most of the time medical doctors and in case of health decision, they might not be aware on some legal aspects governing some decisions. We are there to assist them in the decisions, recommendation they take.

**What do you expect to do during your term of office ?**

It is to assist the forum to take decisions according to law and regulation. In this case, the Forum uses WHO rules and everyone has to abide by them. Traditionally, a legal adviser takes part in all WHO meeting as a participant.

Moreover, governance being a key point in the bank’s strategy to follow-up programs, we are satisfied with the management of the program and also with the results so far. We do appreciate the multiple partnerships and new donors, States, NGDOs and philanthropists. We call for a continue commitment in the fight against NTD.

**What do you say about APOC ?**

According to ADB, we think that the progress of APOC should continue towards elimination. The implication of the bank will enable a better efficiency in terms of running the Program and better use of resources. It is also necessary to note the advocacy towards highest ranking people starts now in order to look for funding for Elimination objectives.

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**What do you say about APOC ?**

Concerning JAF, it is just coincidental. It is right that Burundi was already Vice-President. As God had kept me in life, I have been chosen at the same moment with the Vice-President who is a woman. I am personally happy with the decision.

**What do you expect to do during your term of office ?**

It is to continue, whenever it is possible, to highlight women’s roles. In the fight against onchocerciasis for instance, if we don’t take into consideration gender issues, it will be difficult to have good results.

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