

WCO News

9th February, 2007

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right To Health, Prof. Paul Hunt Visits Uganda

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to health, Prof. Paul Hunt undertook a six-day visit to Uganda at the invitation of the Government of Uganda. The mission involved meetings with the Government, international organisations, donors and civil society, and also included field visits. Prof. Hunt's mission was organised by facilitated by Sida (Uganda), Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Prof. Hunt's mission to Uganda had two main objectives. First was to follow-up on his earlier mission to Uganda in March 2005 which centered on neglected diseases and the right to health and key features of a right-to-health approach to neglected diseases. Second was to understand the role of Sweden, in particular the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), in relation to the right to the highest attainable standard of health in Uganda. This aspect of the mission built upon Prof. Hunt's mission to Sweden in January 2006.

On Thursday 8 February, Professor Hunt held a one day stakeholders' meeting in which he sensitized stakeholders on the right to health approach. The same meeting reviewed progress of the recommendations from the 2005 mission on neglected diseases carried out by Prof Hunt. In addition, the meeting provided a human rights analysis and recommendations on the Health Sector Strategic Plan II 2005/06-2009/10 and this served as input into the forthcoming Mid-term



(L-R) The UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health, Prof. Paul Hunt, the WHO Rep. Dr Melville George, the Minister of Health Dr Steven Malinga and the Charge' d'affaires, Embassy of Sweden/sida Mr. Lundell at the stakeholders' Meeting held at Kabila Country Club, Kampala

Review of the HSSP II.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the Stakeholders' meeting, the Minister of Health Dr Steven Malinga noted that poverty excluded many people from enjoyment of health as a human right. He pointed out that many "neglected diseases" are concentrated in poor people and in marginalised communities.

Dr Malinga informed the meeting that it was out of this realisation that Uganda's Health Policy and HSSP II were designed to address health as human right. He added that that the Minimum Health Care Package exemplified in the HSSP is basically intended to bring health services closer to people and this was out of the realization that health is human right.

Speaking at the same function the WHO Representative Dr Melville George reminded the

audience that the WHO Constitution recognises 'the enjoyment of the highest standard of health as one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition'.

In this regard all UN agencies have a responsibility to integrate a human rights-based approach in their work. As a UN specialised agency, WHO has an obligation to promote and protect human rights in the area of health.

"Human rights have been recognized as a cross-cutting activity in WHO and numerous World Health Assembly resolutions recognise human rights as integral to WHO's mandate and activities" he said.

Dr George reported that in recent years, WHO has strengthened its work on human rights in the health sector and since 2005, when a Health and Human Rights Officer was posted to Uganda, the WHO Country Office has initiated, supported and participated in various activities promoting the right to health.

He added that WHO is in the process of developing a global WHO strategy on health and human rights to guide member states. In this regard, Uganda has the opportunity to demonstrate the importance of human rights in health and even accelerate the process.

In conclusion Dr George emphasised that partnership is key in addressing issues of human rights and health. "Linkages and collaboration have been established between the Ministry of Health, the Uganda Human Rights Commission, WHO, OHCHR, civil society, academic institutions and professional associations in support of the right to health. Let us continue to widen and strengthen this collaboration. Health is a human right and priority".

Present at the stakeholders' meeting were the Permanent Secretary Ministry of Health, the Acting Director General of Health Services, the Chairperson of the Uganda Human Rights Commission, several senior high ranking government officials and senior officials from the civil society.