SPEECH TO BE DELIVERED BY IBOLELO WARD COUNCILLOR MR. BRIGHTON YAMBA ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD AIDS DAY INTERFAITH CANDLE LIGHT MEMORIAL SERVICES AT THE UNITED CHURCH OF ZAMBIA (UCZ) IN SERENJE DISTRICT ON 30TH NOVEMBER, 2022

THE HOST REVLAND, UCZ
THE COUNCIL SECRETARY,
THE DISTRICT MEDICAL DIRECTOR,
HEADS OF GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS,
SERENJE PASTOR'S FELLOWSHIP,
THE LALA ROYAL ESTABLISHMENT REPRESENTATIVES,
FELLOW CONGREGANTS,
THE PRESS,

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN!

I AM GREATLY HONOURED TO BE HERE TODAY BECAUSE THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS DAY CANNOT BE OVER EMPHASIZED.

THIS DAY BRINGS TOGETHER PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT FAITHS TO COMMEMORATE THE WORLD AIDS DAY BY REMEMBERING THE MANY LIVES LOST TO HIV, RENEWING OUR COMMITMENT AND RESPONSIBILITY TO HALT THE FURTHER SPREAD OF THE EPIDEMIC AND MITIGATING THE ADVERSE EFFECTS OF THE DISEASE IN OUR COMMUNITY.

THIS YEAR'S WORLD AIDS DAY INTERFAITH CANDLE LIGHT MEMORIAL SERVICE THEME IS **"EQUALIZE! CLOSING THE GAPS"!**

THE THEME FOCUSES ON INEQUALITIES WHICH PERPETUATE THE AIDS AND IT IS URGING ALL COUNTRIES TO ADDRESS THE INEQUALITIES WHICH ARE HOLDING BACK PROGRESS IN ENDING AIDS.

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN!

THE "EQUALIZE" SLOGAN IS A CALL TO ACTION. IT IS A PROMPT FOR EVERYONE TO WORK FOR THE PROVEN PRACTICAL ACTIONS NEEDED TO ADDRESS INEQUALITIES AND HELP END AIDS. THESE INCLUDE: INCREASE AVAILABILITY, QUALITY AND SUITABILITY OF SERVICES, FOR HIV TREATMENT, TESTING AND PREVENTION, SO THAT EVERYONE IS WELL-SERVED.

OTHER ACTIONS NEEDED TO ADDRESS INEQUALITIES AND HELP END AIDS ARE THE LAW REFORMS, POLICIES AND PRACTICES TO TACKLE THE STIGMA AND EXCLUSION FACED BY PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV AND MARGINALIZED POPULATIONS, SO THAT EVERYONE IS SHOWN RESPECT AND IS WELCOMED.

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN!

WE NEED TO ALSO ENSURE THAT TECHNOLOGY IS SHARED TO ENABLE EQUAL ACCESS TO THE BEST HIV SCIENCE, BETWEEN COMMUNITIES AND BETWEEN THE GLOBAL SOUTH AND NORTH.

COMMUNITIES WILL BE ABLE TO MAKE USE OF AND ADAPT THE “EQUALIZE” MESSAGE TO HIGHLIGHT THE PARTICULAR INEQUALITIES THEY FACE AND TO PRESS FOR THE ACTIONS NEEDED TO ADDRESS THEM.

DATA FROM UNAIDS ON THE GLOBAL HIV RESPONSE REVEALS THAT DURING THE LAST TWO YEARS OF COVID-19 AND OTHER GLOBAL CRISES, PROGRESS AGAINST THE HIV PANDEMIC HAS WEAKENED, RESOURCES HAVE SHRUNK, AND MILLIONS OF LIVES ARE AT RISK AS A RESULT.

FOUR DECADES INTO THE HIV RESPONSE, INEQUALITIES STILL PERSIST FOR THE MOST BASIC SERVICES LIKE TESTING, TREATMENT, AND CONDOMS, AND EVEN MORE SO FOR NEW TECHNOLOGIES.

YOUNG WOMEN IN AFRICA REMAIN DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECTED BY HIV, WHILE COVERAGE OF DEDICATED PROGRAMMES FOR THEM REMAINS TOO LOW.

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN!

IT IS REALLY EVERYONE’S RESPONSIBILITY TO FIGHT AT INDIVIDUAL, COMMUNITY AND DISTRICT LEVEL AND THAT TIME TO TAKE THAT ACTION IS NOW.

I WANT CHALLENGE EVERYONE GATHERED HERE, WHILST WE ARE COMMEMORATING WORLD AIDS DAY, TO ASSESS OUR RESPONSIBILITY, ACTION TAKEN AT DIFFERENT LEVELS AND ASKED OURSELVES IF WE ARE TAKING ACTION TO STOP AIDS.

I ALSO WANT TO CHALLENGE MY FELLOW CHRISTIANS IF WE HAVE TAKEN ACTION NOT TO STIGMATIZE AND DISCRIMINATE ANY ONE BASED ON THEIR HIV AND AIDS STATUS.

THE DARKNESS WE SHALL EXPERIENCE BEFORE THE CANDLE LIGHT SYMBOLIZES THE DARK MOMENTS WE HAVE HAD IN THE MIDST OF THE PANDEMIC SUCH AS DEATHS, PROLONGED ILLNESS, AND THE PAIN IN GIVING

CARE TO THE AFFECTED AND ALSO THE RESOURCE WE HAVE LOST DUE TO THE PANDEMIC .

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN!

THE LIGHT WE ARE GOING TO HAVE WHEN CANDLE IS LIGHT, GIVES US HOPE THAT BEING HIV POSITIVE IS NOT THE END OF ALL.

IT IS THE BEGINNING OF A NEW POSITIVE LIFE. IT ALSO SHOWS US THAT WE ARE NOW ABLE TO TAKE ACTION AND FIGHT THE PANDEMIC, WITH THE LIGHT ON, WE ARE ABLE TO END NEW INFECTIONS, AND HIV/AIDS RELATED DEATHS.

THE CANDLE LIGHT ALSO SYMBOLIZED EVERYONE'S COMMITMENT TO END THE DARKNESS OF STIGMATIZATION AND DISCRIMINATION TO THE PEOPLE INFECTED AND AFFECTED BY THE PANDEMIC.

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN!

LET US COME OUT OF THE DARKNESS! I CHALLENGE MY FELLOW SERENJE RESIDENTS TO CARRY THE LIGHT AND SHINE TO THE WORLD THAT WE ARE READY AS A DISTRICT TO END AIDS BY 2030 AND WE ARE TAKING ACTION NOW!

THE FUTURE IS TRULY OUR RESPONSIBILITY: LET US TAKE ACTION NOW AND LIGHT THE LIGHT OF HOPE AND ACTION.

I THANK YOU AND MAY GOD BLESS EACH AND EVERY ONE OF US!