THE UGANDA RED CROSS SOCIETY

Secretary General’s Christmas and end year message

None of us would have predicted that in the year 2020, the picture we hold of the world would be repainted in a blink of an eye. Undeniably, the COVID-19 pandemic was an unwelcome setback to the URCS and to the world at large.

Nonetheless, my prayer is that this Christmas Season brings glad tidings to all of you and to your families and that the New Year brings renewed hope with it.

We can’t sigh with relief as yet and we shouldn’t throw all caution to the wind and therefore as you celebrate the birth of Christ and as you step into 2021, continue to observe all COVID-19 SOPs, keep on the lookout for the vulnerable and stay true and alive to the spirit of the Red Cross Movement.

I would like to thank the Staff, Volunteers and Members of the Uganda Red Cross Society for walking the talk and displaying selfless dedication and hard work even amidst the challenging year that 2020 was. The pandemic was novel to all of us, but you all proved that you have an unrivalled will and indeed, humanity can count on you.

I would like to extend my gratitude to our partners for their continuous and unwavering support and trust. We couldn’t have done it without you. One African proverb goes; “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” Thank you for walking with us, we surely cannot write our story about our strides and miles without you in it.

The year 2021 and beyond, the focus of the Society shall be on sustainable development and I believe that with concerted efforts and teamwork, we shall achieve this.

Much as the year 2020 was a challenging one, we have so much to celebrate and be thankful for.

We were able to wrap up the 2017/2020 Strategic Plan which was a Recovery Plan from the pit the Society had been plunged into; and we now are starting a new chapter on Sustainable Development with the new URCS Strategic Plan 2021/2025.
A review of the 2017/2020 Strategic Plan indicated that we performed commendably well; and any issues therein that were found outstanding have been incorporated in the Strategic Plan 2021/2025.
I quote Surein Peiris, IFRC National Development Coordinator when conducting a review of URCS change process October 2018; “URCS has recovered fast with minimum external support in comparison with other National Societies that have experienced similar crises”.

This Sustainable Development shall be hinged on four (4) pillars, to wit:

i) Institutional Strengthening which shall ensure a well-functioning and responsive National Society

ii) Membership and Branch Development whose ultimate goal is to ensure the existence of efficient and responsive branch membership & volunteer network

iii) Partnerships & Resource Mobilization whose goal is to improve the financial sustainability of the National Society.

iv) Program Sustainability whose ultimate goal is to promote community wellbeing and resilience

I am elated by the fact that the development of this new Strategic Plan was an all involving process at all levels and as such will be owned by stakeholders at all levels.

The new Strategic Plan will be officially launched at the beginning of the year 2021 and will also be a main agenda item for the National Council meeting early next year. Plans are underway to have the Strategic Plan disseminated early next year and we shall keep everyone posted.

The COVID-19 pandemic paralyzed programming, service delivery and projects but URCS proved that we have the will and dedication to serve humanity and to save lives.

URCS has been privileged to sit on the COVID-19 National Task Force, Community Engagement Task Force, Co-Chair of the Relief Committee and the various Ministry of Health Technical Committees.

Under the guidance of the COVID 19 National Task Force, we deployed and made available URCS resources to respond to COVID -19; guided by our mandate of saving lives; and as auxiliary to Government and other public authorities in the humanitarian field, a role recognized by the Red Cross Act, Cap 54 Laws of Uganda.
URCS ambulances have since been deployed to evacuate COVID 19 patients, we were at the center of the food distribution during the lock down, deployed URCS-teams to manage Boarder screening and Risk Communication is those Boarder districts plus Kampala metropolitan, refuge hosting districts and all other high risk populations.

As the pandemic evolves and is now in communities, all interventions will be aligned to the Community Engagement Strategy (CES), which was established to respond to this phase of the pandemic.
The CES explicitly states that "the District Health Officer (DHO) will be Focal Person supported by the URCS District Officers (call them Branches) and other partners". The objective of this CES is that all people in Uganda are aware, empowered and are participating actively in the prevention and control of the outbreak of the pandemic as both a duty and a right, using existing structures, systems and resources as much as possible.

With support from the Government of Uganda through the Ministry of Health, the URCS procured 10 Class B Aambulances to respond to road traffic accidents on major highways in Uganda. The ambulances were commissioned by the Prime Minister on the 25th day of September 2020. Receiving funds from Government goes lengths to prove the confidence the Government of Uganda has in the URCS to deliver quality services.

At the Commissioning of the Ambulances, the Rt. Hon. Ruhakana Rugunda, Prime Minister of Uganda “We trust the Uganda Red Cross and the proficiency they have exhibited over time. The Government of Uganda trusts that you will deliver on this mandate in close coordination with the Ministry of Health. Go and serve the nation.”

Further that, “The Government is committed to serving Ugandans and will continue to work with organisations such as the Uganda Red Cross Society to enhance service delivery in the country. I urge the public to support the Uganda Red Cross Society and others who are willing to serve the people.”

Let’s build even stronger this confidence the Government has in us.

We are in the process of revising our establishing legislation, the Red Cross Act, Cap 57 Laws of Uganda. This we believe will go lengths at building and strengthening the capacity of the Society.

We are reliably informed by the Committee of Parliament on Presidential Affairs that the report of the Committee on pre-legislative scrutiny is ready for presentation to the House as soon as sessions of Parliament begin in February 2021 after the General Elections.

All factors held constant; it is highly hoped that we shall have a new law by the end of the term of the current Parliament; hence a repositioned and strengthened Society.

In spite of COVID-19 challenges, the National Society delivered on its ongoing programmes, vis: Blood Donor Recruitment, health emergencies and first Aid, support to Refugees, responding to emergencies, especially displacement occasioned by landslides, floods and other climate related emergencies.

As we enter the new year, let’s do so with confidence rest assured that the tools of trade for the year 2021 are in place. I am mindful that the economic situation is not desirably rosy because of the pandemic but we shall progressively review how we remain grounded.

We are officially breaking off on the 21st December 2020 and reporting back on 4th January 2021.
You will notice that we are having a rather long break and this is cognizant of the fact that the year 2020 has been a particularly draining one for staff and volunteers and so it is only fair that we get time to recuperate as we also spend time with our families.

But as you know, the nature of the work of the Society does not allow a total closure and more so the fact that the country is still grappling with the pandemic, climate change related disasters and the fact that the country is at the peak of the political season with the general elections being just 3 weeks away.
There shall therefore be a Standby Team to respond to emergencies for which a duty roster has already been worked out.

I wish you a Merry Christmas and a Blessed 2021.

Robert Kwesiga
Secretary General