

Merck Foundation and African Ministers of Health define interventions to break Infertility Stigma at IFFS World Congress

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[/EINPresswire.com/](http://EINPresswire.com/) -- Merck Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Merck KGaA Germany, in partnership with the International Federation of Fertility Societies- IFFS conducted “Merck More Than a Mother” Ministerial Panel during the 23rd IFFS World Congress held in Shanghai, China with the theme of “No to Infertility Stigma”. The Ministerial panel aims to discuss capacity building and improving access to equitable fertility care solutions in Africa and developing countries.

Merck more than a Mother Ministerial Panel was chaired by Dr. Rasha Kelej, CEO of Merck Foundation and President of Merck More Than a Mother. The panelists included; H.E. Dr. Isatou Touray, Vice President of The Gambia; Hon. Sarah Opendi, Minister of State of Health of Uganda; Hon. Dr. NDIKUMANA Thadée, Minister of Public Health and Fight Against AIDS of Burundi, Hon. Dr. Balandamio Florent, Vice Minister of Health, Republic of Congo, Prof. Joe Leigh Simpson, Immediate Past President of IFFS and Prof. Oladapo Ashiru, President of Africa Fertility Society.



Dr. Rasha Kelej, CEO Merck Foundation & President of Merck More than a Mother with Minister of Health of Uganda, Hon. Sarah Opendi and the Vice President of The Gambia, H. E. Isatou Touray, Minister of Health of Burundi and Vice Minister of Republic of Co



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During the Panel Discussion, Dr. Rasha Kelej, CEO of Merck Foundation and President, Merck More Than a Mother emphasized, “Merck Foundation is dedicated to empowering women who suffer discrimination and violence due to their inability to bring children by defining interventions to break infertility stigma and to building equitable and quality fertility care solutions in Africa and developing countries.”

H.E. Dr. Isatou Touray, Vice President and Minister of Health, Republic of The Gambia stated, “I have heard and witness the stories of infertile women in my country; the attitude of the people towards these women is not progressive or informed. They are usually mistreated by the society. Together with Merck Foundation, we want to remove the stigma associated with it by creating a cultural shift and building cost-effective fertility care in Gambia and rest of Africa”

“I have been associated with Merck Foundation from a very long time now. The work they haven doing has been creating a very significant impact in the lives of infertile women and also men around them by improving access to information and change in the culture and mind set” explained Hon. Sarah Opendi, Minister of State of Health, Republic of Uganda

Hon. Dr. NDIKUMANA Thadée, Minister of Public Health and Fight Against AIDS, Republic of Burundi said, “Most African countries do not have trained fertility experts and embryologists, Merck Foundation has been contributing significantly by providing training to our doctors. This initiative will make history and shape the landscape of fertility care in Burundi and rest of Africa.”

Hon. Dr. Balandamio Florent, Vice Minister of Health, Republic of Congo explained, “Infertility rate is much higher in African Countries as compared to rest of the world. However, African nations do not have the resources and expertise to provide guidance and treatment to infertile couples. This is why “Merck More Than a Mother’ initiative is crucial for our country and other African counties.”

Appreciating the efforts of Merck Foundation, Prof. Joe Leigh Simpson, Immediate Past President of IFFS stated, “I am excited to see the work that Merck Foundation has been doing for many years to create awareness and build fertility care capacity in Africa and developing countries. It



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will indeed create a great impact.”

Prof. Oladapo Ashiru, President of Africa Fertility Society emphasized, “It is very critical to create awareness around infertility prevention and management as around 85% of infertility cases in Africa are caused by untreated infectious diseases, hence are preventable in many cases.”

About ‘Merck More Than a Mother’ campaign;

“Merck More Than a Mother” initiative aims to empower infertile women through access to information, education and health and by changing mind-sets. This powerful initiative supports governments in defining policies to enhance access to regulated, safe and effective fertility care. It defines interventions to break the stigma around infertile women and raises awareness about infertility prevention and management. In partnership with academia, ministries of health and international fertility societies, the initiative also provides medical education and training for healthcare providers and embryologists to build and advance fertility care capacity in Africa and developing countries.

With “Merck More than a mother”, we have initiated a cultural shift to de-stigmatize infertility on all levels: By improving awareness, training the skills of local experts, building advocacy in cooperation with decision makers and by supporting childless women in starting their own small business. It’s all about giving every woman the respect and the help she deserves to live a fulfilling life, with or without a child.

The Ambassadors of “Merck More Than a Mother” are: H.E. NEO JANE MASISI, The First Lady of Botswana; H.E. DENISE NKURUNZIZA, The First Lady of the Republic of Burundi; H.E. BRIGITTE TOUADERA, The First Lady of Central Africa Republic; H.E. HINDA DEBY ITNO, The First Lady of Chad; H.E. REBECCA AKUFO-ADDO, The First Lady of Ghana; H.E. DJÈNÈ CONDÈ, The First Lady of Guinea-Conakry; H.E. FATOUMATTA BAH BARROW, The First Lady of Gambia; H.E. KEÏTA AMINATA MAÏGA, The First Lady of Mali, H.E. AISSATA ISSOUFOU MAHAMADOU, The First Lady of Niger; H.E. FATIMA MAADA BIO, The First Lady of Sierra Leone; H.E. ESTHER LUNGU, The First Lady of Zambia.

Also, part of the campaign is our Merck Embryology & Fertility Training Program, a three-month hands-on practical course in partnership with IRSI, Indonesia, IRRH, India and Manipal Academy of Higher Education (Manipal University), India to establish the platform of fertility specialists across Africa and developing countries. Merck Foundation provided for more than 109 candidates, in clinical and practical training for fertility specialists and embryologists in more than 30 countries across Africa and Asia such as: Chad, Niger, Central African Republic, Cote D’Ivoire , Ghana, Ethiopia , Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania , Zambia , Nigeria, Benin, Mali, Burkina Fuso, Senegal, Guinea Conakry, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cameron, Rwanda, Botswana, DR Congo , Congo Brazzaville, Gambia , Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Cambodia.

Merck Foundation is making history in many African countries where they never had fertility specialists or specialized fertility clinics before 'Merck More Than a Mother' intervention, to train the first fertility specialists.

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