

## Merck Foundation, African Minister of Health defines interventions to break infertility stigma at IFFS World Congress

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**'No to infertility Stigma' was the theme of the “Merck more than a Mother” ministerial panel.**



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.

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 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 mindset” 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 the 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 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."