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**Rotary International Presidential New Generations Conference in  
Kampala with U.S. Ambassador Scott H. DeLisi  
November 5, 2013**

**Ambassador Scott DeLisi:** Rotary President, Ron Burton, distinguished fellow speakers, distinguished Governor - good to see you again - youth of Uganda, all protocols observed. So today it's about taking charge of the future, right? So I'm here to talk to the youth, and I'm looking around, and with all due respect, Mr. President, Jetta, colleagues, Governor, you're not youthful. Neither am I. So let me look out beyond these first few rows there, I put these old folks up front, right, like me?

But let me look beyond that and I'm starting to see some youthful faces. Could I see how many people in this room are under the age of thirty? Could I see your hands? Come on, get them up. Come on, you guys are under thirty, get your hands up. How many of you are under the age of eighteen? Alright, I see, there are some hands, too. So with all due respect to my distinguished colleagues in these first few rows, I'm not talking to you today. I'm talking to the rest of you.

And I want to tell you it's a great honor to be here today, and have this chance to speak with you. And I want to thank you, I want to thank the Rotary for the invitation to be here today, because Rotary International is a very special organization, and it is a great privilege to be part of this event. Rotary has a long history of mobilizing talented professionals to respond to community needs across the world. And we are here today with the hope of inspiring you, the youth and the future of Uganda, to respond to the needs of your communities and of your beautiful country.

Our theme today is "Taking Charge of the Future." Just what does that mean? In any society, including in the United States of America, there are plenty of issues to discuss as we look at the future. We discuss them, we lament about them, and we debate about what that future should look like. But lamenting, and discussing, and debating aren't enough. We must be active, we must engage, we must commit ourselves to making a difference, and we must take charge if we want to shape a future that matches our dreams and our hopes.

Here in Uganda, as we look at that future, the one overarching issue that cuts across all others is the fact that this population is so young. Thirty-six percent of the population in this country, more than one out of every three persons in Uganda, is under the age of nine, just like this young lady walking up the aisle here. That's the future. One third of this country is under the age of nine years of age. Your nation has the most youthful population of any country on this planet, and with the birth rate, that is very high in this nation, that youthful population is not likely to change anytime soon. Managing the future of this country and meeting your citizens' needs as its population grows and ages, will require that all of you who raised your hand earlier take charge. We need you to do that.

But in order to do this, in order to take charge, you must first have a vision of the future that you seek to create. When you think about your life ten years from now, where do you want to be? What will you have accomplished? What will you aspire to? How will you move your life and your country forward? Take a minute to think about these questions, and really think about them. These answers, the answers that you find for yourself will begin to shape your vision of what the future should look like. And having a well-developed and clear vision is fundamental to your success, and the success of your nation as a whole. You are the future of Uganda, you are the future of East Africa, and what you choose to do over the next decade will make a huge difference.

Now let's broaden our scope and think not only about yourself and your life, but think about the Uganda that you would like to see ten years, or twenty years in the future. What does it look like? Based on my conversations with young people across the country, I suspect you would like to see a robust economy, a solid middle class, excellent educational opportunities for

yourself and for your children, great healthcare, jobs, and a government with strong institutions that are responsive to the needs of the people, and that fights to end the scourge of corruption. The U.S. Embassy shares that vision with you.

You envision Uganda as a peaceful, prosperous, healthy, and democratic society. So do we. You believe this country has a bright potential future. So do we. But I'm willing to bet we agree on one more thing as well. That bright future that you can see for Uganda that is within grasp is not guaranteed. It can only come with hard work, and commitment, and a united effort. And that could be the most important thing that we agree upon today. Taking charge of the future means taking on responsibility, it means, making an effort, and it means giving of yourself for a better Uganda, for all of this nation's citizens. If you are prepared to commit yourself to shaping that future, we, the government of the United States and the people of the United States, are committed to walking that road with you.

The fact is that we have a long history of collaboration, and we are Uganda's single largest bilateral donor and partner, precisely because we believe in Uganda and we believe in you. And I hope over the past fifty years, the people of Uganda have seen the depth and the steadfastness of our commitment to Uganda, and to you. Your success is good for you, it is good for East Africa, it is good for the United States, and it is good for the planet. And as you seek to move your nation on a successful path, we know that we must work with you, the nation's youth, to give you the skills to take charge effectively.

With that in mind, our engagement with youth in Uganda is very broad, and many of you ... some of you may be on our Embassy Facebook page, or on my Facebook page, and if you are, you have seen the consistent messages and the consistent actions we have taken to support young people, and to try to make a difference. And if you haven't been on those pages, go to them; take a look. Go back over the past few months, read the speeches, and you will see detailed, the many different steps that we are taking to try to empower the youth of this country, to give you the skills and the resources you need to make a difference.

You will find that we focus on helping young people to take charge in three crucial areas of your life. First, there is the world of work. Maybe you hope to start a business. Perhaps you'll develop technology that makes life easier for your friends and neighbors. And we supported a program called "Apps for Africa," where a young Ugandan won because they came up with innovative ideas using technology to make lives better, lives easier, for your citizens. But whatever work you may choose, whatever your calling may be, we want to partner with you to help you build a sustainable ... sustainable life and sustainable economic opportunities for all Ugandans. That's the world of work, and we're committed to making that world of work successful, because if there aren't jobs for you, if there are not opportunities for you to live lives of productivity and dignity in building the future of your nation, you will be challenged, and so will we all. So we are committing to walking that road with you.

Secondly, we want to join forces with the young people of this country in the realm of active citizenship. We want to help you to fight the corruption that threatens your future, and the future of this country. We want to work with you to strengthen institutions and to promote an increasingly responsive democracy, one in which the institutions are empowered to make decisions and build the right future for this nation. Every one of you deserves to live in a society where you can depend on your own hard work, honesty, and perseverance to get you somewhere, and your government needs to be structured in a way that gives you that opportunity, and allows you to realize the fruits of your labor. And that's what active citizenship can do, but you have to be active. You have to be committed to building that future for your country, because democracy doesn't just happen. You must work at it every day, we have to work at it in the United States, and we need you to work at it here. We will partner with you in doing that.

And third, we will work with you in the arena of family life, to help ensure that the citizens of Uganda live healthy, productive lives, to be able to participate in the economic future of this country, and so that you can pass that same opportunity to your children, and to your grandchildren. Like you, we want to see maternal and infant mortality rates drop significantly. Like you, we want to fight diseases like polio, and malaria, and the other diseases that threaten your future and decrease productivity. We want to eliminate the unnecessary deaths that we see from malaria and tuberculosis,

unnecessary deaths in childbirth, and we want to see an HIV-free generation in your lifetime.

But again, we need your commitment and your efforts to make that happen. But if you do, we will stand in partnership with you for all of these goals. But make no mistake, however much we may share a common vision, and no matter how much we want to give you the tools that you need to be successful, this is your nation, and it is you who must do the hard work, it is you who must define the future, and it is you that ultimately will have to find the answers.

You must start businesses and meet the material or service needed in the society, and provide jobs for your fellow Ugandans. You must actively engage in the political process in an honest and transparent fashion, refusing to accept the argument that corruption is the only way to go, that patronage is the answer. You have to make a difference. And you must make healthy choices, responsible choices, and encourage those others who are part of your lives, your friends and your family, to do the same. You must be responsible for not only your health and your future, but the future and the health of those that you love, and that means making smart choices, responsible choices, and I hope you will do that. And if you do so, we will look for every way we can to partner with you in those efforts.

One of the ways that the U.S. Embassy does this is by helping to develop and nurture young Ugandan leaders, and I know that there are many of them in this room today, and that organizations like the Rotary help to build these future leaders, as well. And leadership is critical to the future. And I know that President Obama feels the same way. And he has said, "America believes in Africa as a region of growing opportunity and promise, for Africa, for America, and for our people and for our economies." We believe that Africa can be the world's next major economic success story, and it is for that reason, and it is based on that belief, that President Obama launched the Young African Leaders Initiative in 2010. We aim to empower the next generation of African leadership through this, and through other programs.

Now, President Obama launched that program in 2010, and today, three young Ugandans have participated in the Young African Leaders Initiative. But when President Obama was on this continent a few months ago, he not only renewed his commitment to building the future, and to the youth of this

continent, but he committed himself to expanding this program. And in the next year, we hope that the numbers of young Africans and young Ugandans who will take advantage of this program is going to increase dramatically. Thirty or more Ugandan youths, we hope.

And maybe even some of you in this audience today, will have the opportunity in the coming months to travel to the United States for six weeks of leadership and professional training at top American universities. Following that, participants will travel to Washington D.C. for a summit with President Obama. And once they return to Uganda, they will have opportunities through internships and networking programs that will give you the opportunity to put your newfound perspectives and skills into practice, taking charge of Uganda's future, and finding like-minded partners to do that.

I encourage you to apply online in December when the selection process opens, and visit - write this down - visit [youngafricanleaders.state.gov](http://youngafricanleaders.state.gov). In the meantime, for more information and to register for updates, and if you didn't get a chance to write it down, that's okay; go to my Facebook page, Scott H. DeLisi. And you go to the page, we'll post this speech, and you'll find that website there. Go to it, register, be part of this.

One of our participants in the Young African Leadership Initiative was inspired at a very young age to take charge of her own future. She started a business selling food at the side of the road before she went to school each day. Her classmates made fun of her, and they nicknamed her Chicken after her staple dish that she sold. Well, Chicken didn't let being made fun of stop her. She was the prefect of her class, and she was an outstanding student. Her hard work got her to college, where she started a new business selling dried fish. By then she was making money. Nobody started to call her Fish. Her successful company today provides jobs for others, and promotes skill building in local fishing villages. She gives back to her community by mentoring teenagers and primary school students.

By taking charge of her own future, this young woman has helped myriad others to do the same. She took charge. We need you to do the same thing. Participating in the Young African Leaders Initiative did not make this talented woman into a leader. She was already a leader. It did, however,

broaden her skill set and connect her with people that supported her in taking her dreams to the next level, and that is what we hope for all of you. And we will remain committed to this. And it's not just through the President's Initiative. We have many other programs in our embassy, many other ways in which we are engaging, creating internships, providing opportunities.

We have a program in Northern Uganda where over two hundred young people worked with one of our implementing partners in doing development work in Northern Uganda, and of that two hundred, many of them ended up getting jobs with that company. Others went on to other opportunities because of the skill sets they developed. We can work together to build that future. We can work together to make dreams come true.

But I know, I know that not every dream is realized, and I hear complaints every day about service delivery, about failures in education, about problems in governance. I hear about poverty. I hear questions about equal opportunity, and many more. I know that it often can feel like you take one step forward and then two steps back, and that may be true sometimes, and that may be true for some of you. You need only to look around to see the many challenges that young Ugandans face as they try to build the future.

I know that people are struggling, and I know that it's difficult not to give up. However, you cannot despair. You cannot abandon your dreams. There is hope, there is opportunity therein; there is a better future that can be yours if you are willing to fight for it. And I am heartened by the talented, motivated youth I meet in Uganda every single day who look beyond the problems and the challenges to see opportunities and solutions. Don't fall into the traps of cynicism, anger, or violence. They serve no productive end. They will not improve your life. Instead, stand up and join the search for solutions. You must take charge. You must take charge, because you are the future of Uganda, and if you don't do this, who will? No one. And it is your future that is at stake.

Today, I challenge you to look at your life and your country a little differently. Define yourself and your country by your strengths, rather than your weaknesses. You must think about who you are, not who you aren't. Uganda's strength lies in this young population, in her fertile soil, her

culturally diverse society, and her eagerness to be a leader in East Africa and on this continent. Focusing on the strengths doesn't mean that you ignore the problems. On the contrary, it means that you use your talents, you use your successes, you use the abilities, you use what you have, and you use those resources to solve the problems, to make a difference.

But you must start from the perspective of recognizing what you do have, that there is an abundance. It's not just scarcity. Use that abundance and make a difference. Once you've set your goals and recognized your strengths, make a plan. A goal without a plan to achieve it is as good as no goal at all. What concrete steps will you take to help you reach your goals, to build the life that you seek for yourself and for your country? Expect the best, but plan for the worst. Seek out others who have gone before and have been successful, and draw upon their expertise and experience. Get them to mentor you. Join organizations like Rotary. Draw upon the skills of these old folks up front. Let them be a guide. Let them help you to build the future that you seek. But be innovative, be creative, and be true to yourself, and believe in yourself, and don't lose sight of your goal when times are tough. Times are going to be tough, but if you persevere, you can begin to change things.

Finally, I would say to you, do the right thing always. Don't take the shortcuts offered by corruption or cheating. Be creative. Think big. Believe in yourself, believe in your fellow Ugandans, and believe in your future. Who does that future belong to? It belongs to you, all of those of you who raised your hand, and that little girl who was in the aisle, that group under nine, that's who the future belongs to. It belongs to you.

And who is responsible for that future of Uganda? Again, the answer is you. Take charge of it, make it yours, make a difference. Make the choice today to be an agent of positive change for yourself, your family, and your country. And know that Rotary International and the U.S. Embassy in Kampala will join you in creating a new and bright future for yourselves and for your nation. I thank you and I wish you all the best in the future, and I thank our colleagues from Rotary. Thank you.