

Coalition for Global Hepatitis Elimination Names Mr. Arafat Bwambale as 2021 Elimination Champion

– Mr. Bwambale is a co-founder of the Great Lakes Peace Center and a community leader in raising awareness on viral hepatitis –

Atlanta, GA., July 28, 2021 – In honor of World Hepatitis Day, the Coalition for Global Hepatitis Elimination is pleased to announce Mr. Arafat Bwambale was selected as a 2021 Elimination Champion for his contributions to advancing hepatitis elimination in Uganda.

Mr. Bwambale is a community leader dedicated to mobilizing and empowering patients in the fight against hepatitis B and C. After witnessing how a lack of awareness and stigma around hepatitis B can devastate families first hand, Mr. Bwamable co-founded the Great Lakes Peace Centre (GLPC), a grass root youth led organisation in Kasese, Rwenzori Sub-Region in Western Uganda. At Great Lakes Peace Centre, he works in advocacy and peacebuilding to support youth empowerment and social justice in Uganda, with a focus on destigmatizing viral hepatitis. In addition, Bwambale is the focal person for hepatitis B at Bwera General Hospital, supporting hospital-based awareness efforts and running a hepatitis B patient support group.

Through his work, Bwambale has increased screening for viral hepatitis, educated his community to reduce stigma, and advocated for HBV birth dose vaccination. Additionally, he has organized annual hepatitis B charity walks to rally domestic political support and highlight the risks of HBV. The charity walks have been attended by high-level political figures, the Prime Minister, members of Parliament, local leaders, religious leaders, and many community members. In response to the charity walks, Parliament allocated domestic funding to the hepatitis B program for the first time, at about US\$ 3 million annually.

When the Ugandan government declared a lockdown to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, Bwambale arranged for a team of five youth volunteers to help deliver medication by bike, motorbike, and foot to almost 400 patients. He also coordinated an emergency phone line for patients to call and request medications they could not access.

“Our major aim of the organization was to truly empower patients with information which is relevant, easily understood, and comprehensible. We realized this was important to ensure the misconceptions were reduced within our communities....I felt that I think it is important for us as young people to bring in some energy and prescribe solutions to the problems facing our community,” says Bwambale.

In all, six Elimination Champions were selected across the world. The other champions selected were:

- Dr. Mohammad Ali, Bangladesh
- Dr. John Dillon, Scotland
- Ms. Rachel Gonzalez and Dr. Angela Park, United States
- Dr. Gamal Shiha, Egypt
- Dr. Alethse de la Torre Rosas, Mexico

The Elimination Champion initiative was launched in 2019 and aims to recognize the remarkable contributions of individuals to improved political commitment, policies, and programs that expand

access to interventions and accelerate progress toward hepatitis elimination, particularly in areas with limited resources.

“In light of COVID-19, now more than ever, we need individuals to step up to ensure hepatitis testing and treatment is available to all persons and governments commit to hepatitis elimination. This year’s Elimination Champions are inspirational in their dedication to reducing disparities and working towards a day when all hepatitis infections and deaths are averted. They have truly pushed their nations and the world closer to that day,” says Dr. John Ward, Director of the Coalition for Global Hepatitis Elimination.

The Elimination Champion 2021 nominations were opened from March 29th to May 24th, 2021. In all, 17 nominations were received from 15 countries, across all WHO regions. A panel of judges representing previous Elimination Champions, elimination program managers, the major liver disease professional associations, civil society, and donors assessed the nominations. Champions will receive awards by mail, and their profiles will be added to <https://www.globalhep.org/champions>.

World Hepatitis Day

World Hepatitis Day is commemorated each year on 28 July to enhance awareness of viral hepatitis, an inflammation of the liver that causes a range of health problems, including liver cancer. There are five main strains of the hepatitis virus – A, B, C, D and E. Together, hepatitis B (HBV) and C (HCV) are the most common, with 354 million people living with HBV or HCV globally and more than 1.3 million lives lost each year. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, viral hepatitis continues to claim thousands of lives every day. See more at <https://www.who.int/campaigns/world-hepatitis-day/2021>

Coalition for Global Hepatitis Elimination

With the availability of reliable tests, highly protective hepatitis B vaccines, effective HBV medications, and curative HCV therapies in hand, in 2016, the WHO set targets for HBV and HCV elimination by 2030. The Coalition for Global Hepatitis Elimination (CGHE) was launched in July 2019 to accelerate progress toward these goals. Modelled after other disease elimination initiatives managed by the Task Force for Global Health, CGHE aims to strengthen the capacity of national and subnational hepatitis elimination programs through advocacy, technical assistance, knowledge generation, and dissemination among partners united in a community of practice. Find out more at www.globalhep.org.

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