

## MEDIA RELEASE

### UGANDA CELEBRATES FIRST GRADUATION OF OPTOMETRISTS

**16 January 2019, Kampala, Uganda:** Today marks the momentous occasion of the pioneer optometrists graduating at Makerere University in Kampala after completing the first optometry degree ratified in Uganda. These graduating optometrists are the first locally trained optometrists for their country, and will act as the primary eye carers for optometry services for the population.

Uganda is one of the African countries supporting optometry as a relevant profession to help solve their nation's burgeoning eye care needs. Currently, there are less than 10 practicing optometrists in Uganda to service the population of 40 million, all of which received their training overseas.

Professor Charles Ibigira, Principal of the College of Health Sciences, Makerere University spoke enthusiastically. "Makerere University is very grateful for the support to start the much needed Optometry program from Brien Holden Vision Institute by providing high tech equipment, curriculum development, human resources and inspiration through their vision. This has put Makerere University in the lead by providing optometry training and optometry services in Uganda, done in partnership with the College of Health Sciences."

The progression of having locally trained optometrists in Uganda will raise the efficiency of eye care services by increasing access for the population and strengthen referral pathways enabling great cost-effectiveness for the existing health systems. Optometrists will relieve ophthalmologists from providing eye care services like refraction and prescribing glasses, allowing them to focus on medical and surgical treatments of care.

Dr Naomi Nsubuga, Sub-regional Manager, Brien Holden Vision Institute has been an active proponent in the development of optometry in Uganda since 2004. "It gives me great pleasure knowing we can now train optometrists locally in Uganda using internationally developed teaching materials and using the latest advanced equipment. The graduate optometrists from Makerere University will provide much needed optometry services to the people of Uganda," she said.

Establishing the School of Optometry at Makerere University took more than ten years of intense planning, negotiations and collaboration by many dedicated partners working closely with the University. These included the Brien Holden Vision Institute, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, University of New South Wales in Australia, Optometry Giving Sight, Light for the World, and the Optometrist Association of Uganda. Together all partners are collectively overjoyed to celebrate the first graduation as a landmark achievement for Uganda.

Also attending the graduation ceremony is Petronella Nichols, Africa Regional Director, Brien Holden Vision Institute said, "Today we see the first optometry students graduate in Uganda because of the collaborative efforts and shared vision of all partners and stakeholders. With these pioneer graduates we greatly look forward to seeing optometry services reaching many more Ugandans in need of glasses and facilitating referrals for more serious eye conditions such as cataract and glaucoma."



Dr Luigi Bilotto, Director of Education, Brien Holden Vision Institute reiterated the importance of optometry for Uganda. “The introduction of optometrists in the health workforce is a significant milestone for Uganda taking it a step further in the fight against avoidable blindness and vision impairment.”

Dr Anguyo Dralega, Head of the Optometry School, Makerere University said excitedly. “The young optometrists are the building blocks for a sustainable eye care service in Uganda, which has a population of around 39.5 million people. They will relieve the country’s 45 ophthalmologists from the management of eye conditions, allowing them to concentrate on other areas of specialties. Additionally, the optometrists will help improve the quality of life for many Ugandans with uncorrected vision impairment by providing refraction services and appropriate glasses. The benefit of this simple measure cannot be underestimated by a life diminished through poor vision.”

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**About Brien Holden Vision Institute**

Brien Holden Vision Institute, Public Health is a global non-profit, non-governmental organisation who since 1998 has delivered sustainable eye care services, education and training programs in over 60 countries, providing eye care to over 15 million people at more than 400 eye care sites and training 250,000 eye care personnel.

We believe sight is a fundamental right for everyone, everywhere. Globally there are 1.2 billion people who are blind or vision impaired because they don’t have access to eye care. Our mission is to develop solutions for vision care and eliminate vision impairment and avoidable blindness, thereby reducing poverty and suffering.