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## OFFICE OF THE VICE-CHANCELLOR PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICE

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### MAK TO HONOUR THE FAMOUS GORILLA CONSERVATIONIST

*(Transcribed from the Press Conference held at the Media Centre ahead of the Award of Honorary Doctor of Science to Ms Ruth Morris Keesling)*

The Makerere University Chancellor, Prof. George Mondo Kagonyera will on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> January 2015, confer an honorary Doctor **of Science (Honoris Causa) of Makerere University** to Ms. Ruth Morris Keesling, a celebrated American wildlife conservationist who has dedicated her life, resources, and purpose for living to the transformation of Makerere University, the advancement of Veterinary Medicine and Wild Life, animal health research and tourism in Uganda, Africa and world over.

Speaking during the Press Conference at the Media Centre on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2015, Makerere University Deputy Vice Chancellor in charge of Academic Affairs, Associate Prof. Okello Ogwang said that the award is in recognition and appreciation of Keesling's sponsorship and selfless contribution to the transformation of Makerere University, and to the scientific research and training in animal conservation which has boosted the tourism industry in Uganda.

"Following the University procedure, the Management of the College of Veterinary Medicine, Animal Resource and Bio-security (CoVAB) in 2014 presented a proposal to award Ms. Ruth Morris Keesling with an Honorary Doctor of Science to the Honorary Degree committee of Makerere University. This proposal was then presented to the University Senate-the supreme academic organ of the University, which unanimously recommended the consideration of the award. The University Council considered and unanimously approved the award of the Honorary Doctor of Science to Ms Ruth Morris Keesling," remarked Dr. Okello Ogwang.

The Principal Makerere University College of Veterinary Medicine, Animal Resources and Bio Security Prof John David Kabasa, said in addition to research, Ms Keesling had sponsored up to 36 Bachelors and Masters degrees and PHDs at the Makerere University in the College of Veterinary Medicine, Research, and Bio-security.

“She is also contributing to the building of a regional centre for wildlife health, tourism research and extension training at the Makerere University Veterinary School as well as supporting Gorilla doctors,” said Prof. Kabasa.

A celebrated American wildlife conservationist, Ruth Morris Keesling for the last 28 years has dedicated her energies, finance and time to carry on the gorilla conservation legacy of the late primatologist Dian Fossey. This has made major contribution to the recovery of the mountain Gorilla population from 248 at the time to the current estimate of 880.

According to the Chief Executive officer of Uganda Tourism Board (UTB) Mr. Steven Asiimwe, the Uganda Tourism industry appreciates the pivotal work and efforts of Ms. Keesling and family towards wild life conservation and education in Uganda.

“Keesling’s hard work has boosted and transformed the tourism sector in Uganda. As we speak now tourism is the number one foreign exchange earner and it has been growing since 2006. Therefore, the Uganda Tourism Board together with Uganda Wildlife Authority and Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities are celebrating with Ms. Ruth Morris Keesling and her family this great achievement of an Honorary Doctorate of Science of Makerere University,” remarked Mr. Asiimwe.

Addressing journalists, Ms. Keesling applauded Makerere University for considering her for the award of the Honorary Doctorate of Science. She also thanked Makerere University for the support rendered to her during the journey of her work. She noted that the support she has been getting from Uganda, Rwanda and Tanzania has been absolutely of great help since she managed to save the gorillas.

MS. Keesling also remarked that for the many years she has spent relating with gorillas, she has noticed several features that portray their uniqueness from other animals. She said that such features tremendously captivated her to spend her life helping and saving these fabulous animals.

“Compared to their closest animal relatives the chimps, Gorillas have a very close relationship. The wife determines what male she wants to live with, so she picks on her own husband of whom they will manage their own family. This was very interesting to discover,” said Ms. Keesling.

Born on 4th April 1930 in New Brunswick, New Jersey, United States, Ms Ruth Morris Keesling, grew up in the first small animal hospital in the country, established by her veterinarian father, Dr. Mark L. Morris, in New Jersey. She learned to love animals at an early age. After graduating from the University of Colorado in 1953 with a degree in Journalism, she chose to become a partner in Mark Morris Associates and Theracon Laboratories, the Family’s Animal Nutritional Research Organizations which developed Prescription Diets and Science Diets for dogs and cats.

Since 1948, she has worked as a lifetime Trustee and Executive Committee member to develop the Morris Animal Foundation (MAF), which is dedicated to solving health problems in companion animals and wildlife. Today, MAF is the largest animal-specialist non-governmental organization in the world.

**Compiled by: Ms Ritah Namisango, Mak Public Relations Office, 20<sup>th</sup> January 2015**