

Statement on the Launch of a Cervical Cancer Screening Project – Phila Ma – held in Inanda, 11 August 2009

Today, the KwaZulu-Natal MEC for Health; Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, the African Union Goodwill Ambassador: maternal, child and women's health, Dr Manto Tshabalala- Msimang and the First Lady Mrs T Madiba-Zuma; launch a campaign to educate women of child bearing age about the importance of getting checked for cervical cancer.

They all declared in unison that; "No Women Should die giving birth! - PHILA MA (be healthy mother in isiZulu)"

In her address the First Lady, Mrs Madiba-Zuma said; "Health services need to be made friendlier to women (especially young women) so that they can openly discuss, with health professionals, intimate matters such as screening for cervical cancer. Lack of information, poverty and low levels of education are making fall prey to preventable and treatable diseases such as cervical cancer. I have dedicated myself and my skills to the pursuance of a noble goal to ensure that children do not grow up without mother because they die at birth or early in their lives because of cervical cancer".

She was followed by the former Minister of Health and the African Union Goodwill Ambassador, Dr Tshabalala-Msimang; who was received with great enthusiasm from the crowd and health workers who had gathered for the launch. She said; "I have just come from Malawi where I was invited to launch their maternal, child and women's health initiative. They also gave me this dress which is written: Healthy Mother. Healthy Child. Healthy Malawi! This demonstrates that African governments are seriously taking forward the commitments contained in the Maputo Plan of Action on the Operationalization of the Continental Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Policy Framework. This launch puts our country and province at the fore front of making real better maternal, child and women's health and rights.

She continued to add; "We need to add our voice, in support of the MEC, to demand more budgets for health in order to meet our endeavours in improving maternal, child and women's health and rights. Health care workers should not take sexually transmitted infections lightly. I was also taught that it is normal for a woman to have a discharge. Now I do not believe this. Every discharge must be taken seriously. Female health workers who ignore a discharge are committing a crime."

In his address, the MEC told a personal story about his family. He said; "I come from a family where my father's first wife died while giving birth. In those times and even years later when I was a doctor; a maternal death had to be thoroughly investigated. It was uncommon for women to die giving life. In my village, teMbumbulu, the neighbours talked about the death in my family for sometime. As a person who has never been an orphan; I cannot put myself in the shoes of an orphan and I do not envy them. I always ask myself, how did I survive the first twelve months, five years or fifteen years? I really feel lucky and I owe it to my mother.

"It is for this reason that we are here today to launch this very important campaign. We also came to this area because of high poverty rate which has been found to be dragging women into ill-health and early death. A country's progress is measured by the way it treats its women and children. Our history will also judge us by the way we turn the tide against high maternal death, infant mortality and perinatal death rates" he said.

The launch entails the provision of cervical screening services and other primary health care services to the people of Amaoti and surrounding communities. These services are to be rolled out throughout the province during the month of August – the women's month.

ENDS

ISSUED BY:
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH