

Speech by KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo at the Provincial Candlelight Ceremony at Sisonke District

28 May 09

Programme Director: Rev Siphon Mtshwa

The Rev Zolani Stuurman (our Chaplain in Ixopo within the Health District of Sisonke) kanye nabo bonke abaholi bamabandla abavela emahlelweni ezinkonzo ahlukene

Inkosi Chiliza kanye nawo onke Amakhosi akhona aseNdlunkulu nezinduna zamakhosi)

MEC Agriculture: Environment and Rural Development Honourable Lydia Johnson

Mayor of Sisonke District Municipality: Councillor J P Khoza

M Mjoli from the People Living With HIV and Aids

In his Address during the International Candlelight Memorial Day, at Rustenburg in 2005, the then Deputy President of our country, Hon Jacob Zuma, had this to say:

'There are certain days in the calendar of the year that bring us all together to focus on the difficulties and challenges we face in the response to HIV and AIDS. These days also serve to bring us together to learn from each other, encourage and draw strength from each other.'

Candlelight Memorial Day is one such day - an opportunity for

each one of us to dedicate ourselves - for the first time or once again - to the fight against HIV and AIDS and to the fight against discrimination and injustice that make the lives of people living with HIV and AIDS that much harder.'

Compatriots, from 1983 when the International Candlelight Memorial day was first observed, our country has always religiously adhered to it.

Throughout the past 25 years we have enjoined the global community in bringing together people, individuals, organizations, sectors and communities to honour the lives of those lost to AIDS-related illnesses, to give support to People Living with HIV, and to raise social consciousness about HIV and AIDS.

The International Candlelight Memorial Campaign also provides opportunities for the strengthening of leadership, policy advocacy, partnerships, and social mobilization in response to HIV and AIDS.

The objectives of this campaign are humbling and very noble as they encompass the following:

- Commemorate and celebrate the lives of those lost as a result of AIDS – related illnesses,
- Provide care and support to those living with and/or affected by HIV and AIDS,

- Strengthen and sustain multi-sectoral partnerships to ensure a comprehensive, collaborative and coordinated response to HIV and AIDS
- Promote a culture of respect and inclusiveness, and give voice to those infected and/or affected by HIV including women and children
- Promote access to prevention, treatment, care and support for People Living with HIV and their families

In our Province, we would like to announce that this Government led by Khabazela promotes the culture of respect and inclusiveness, and does give voice to those infected and or affected by HIV. As caring citizens, let us all give support. This must be done in line with the 2009 theme for the International Candlelight Memorial Campaign which says: **“Together, we are the Solution.”**

In the past month we all worked together and we agreed with our President that, *working together we can do more*. That call is upon us again as we say, *together, we are the solution*. But what does that mean to the 10 million citizens of this Province who account for 28, 7% of all South African HIV infections?

It means that as citizens we need to know our status and avail ourselves for Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT). This service is available at 100% of our Primary Health Care clinics and hospitals as well as to 60% of our mobile clinics. To extend the service and to make sure that it accessible to a wider community we are now

targeting non-medical site to become VCT sites. The non-medical sites are in the following sectors:

- *Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Life Line, Attic*
- *Community Care Centres, also known as National Integrated Plan (NIPs)*
- *Faith Based Organizations e.g. The Hope Centre in Ethekewini*
- *Private companies and business sector, such as Toyota in Durban and Darno Text Tile in Hammarsdale and Willowton in Pietermaritzburg*
- *High Transmission Areas, targeting truck drivers*

- We need to inculcate the ethos of abstinence to our young people. Akungajahwa! (Ecclesiastes Chapter 8: Verse 3 – it reads as follows: “Ungasheshi ukusuka ebusweni beNkosi; ungemi endabeni embi ngokuba yenza konke ekuthandayo”
- We need to prevent Sexually Transmitted Infections and make use of Barrier Methods offered.
- We need to support the Government in its efforts aimed at Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV (PMTCT) with the full understanding that this programme is one of the cornerstones in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) aimed at reducing the maternal and infant mortality in the country.
- As compatriots, we need to ensure that Anti-Retroviral Therapy is made available to all those in need and also ensure adherence.

- We also need to understand that all patients presenting themselves at TB facilities are now screened for HIV and vice versa.
- We to enlighten our people about the Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) which is a service that is offered to people who have been exposed to HIV infection either through occupational means or through sexual assault or rape.
- We need to give support and respect to those who partake in the Care and Support Programme. The Home Based Care practitioners are doing a tremendous job to bed ridden patients and others that have been discharged from our health institutions.
- Most importantly, let us give support to orphans and vulnerable children located in the NIP sites that the Department sponsor in conjunction with the Department of Social Development and the Department of Education. As Africans let us continue saying: *“ayikho intandane emiphakathini yethu”*.

Together, we are the solution.

We need Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), the Provincial Inter-Departmental Committee for HIV and AIDS, the Provincial AIDS Council, Traditional healers, the business sector to pool our resources together - to find the solutions to the challenges posed by HIV and AIDS. Together we can beat the HIV and AIDS. Our strength lies in our unity. The HIV and Aids challenge is indeed surmountable when we work together.

Government alone will not do it. The people of this country alone cannot do it. But this calls for a collective effort. We must put aside narrow agendas and focus on matters that heal our nation.

As we remember all the beloved who passed on as a result of this incurable disease, let us recommit to put into action all the stipulations of the Comprehensive HIV and AIDS Care, Management and Treatment Plan (CCMT) which is guided by the National strategic Plan of 2007 -2011 with the following Key Priority Areas:

Key Priority Area 1: Prevention

- ❖ Reduce vulnerability to HIV infection and the impacts of AIDS
- ❖ Reducing sexual transmission of HIV
- ❖ Reduce mother-to-child transmission of HIV
- ❖ Minimize the risk of HIV transmission through blood and blood products

Key Priority Area 2: Treatment, Care and Support

- ❖ Increase coverage to Voluntary Counselling and Testing and promote
- ❖ Enable people living with HIV to lead healthy and productive lives
- ❖ Address the special needs of women and children
- ❖ Mitigate the impacts of HIV and AIDS and create an enabling social environment of care, treatment and support

Let us continue building up to what we know works taking into consideration our theme for 2006 that said: “*Lighting the Path to a Brighter Future*”.

We also need to draw inspiration from our last year’s Theme which was: “STOP HIV AND AIDS ... NEVER GIVE UP”.

In all this ladies and gentlemen we are reminded to reinforce the **A**bstinence, **B**e faithful and the correct and consistent use of **C**ondoms as the core HIV prevention strategy.

We are also called upon to eradicate all forms of sexual violence, especially violence against women and children, as this fuels HIV and AIDS.

If we all agree that, *Together, we are the Solution*, then let it be our responsibility to become actively involved in the reduction of HIV and AIDS related stigma and discrimination.

We won’t fail.

As a word of gratitude to all our hard-working civil servants I want to leave you with words of encouragement that we received two days ago from our State President, Hon. Jacob Zuma. Here is what he is saying to all of you:

“We promised South Africans that we would speed up change, that we would ensure that they are treated with dignity and respect by public servants, and that we will work with them in partnership in delivering services,” He went on to say: *“We are proud of thousands of our public servants who work efficiently and diligently, going beyond the call of duty to serve our people. We know many of them.”*

Again, Ladies and Gentlemen, we say thank you for the prayers that serve as a comforter to all the infected and affected souls of this beautiful land.

We reiterate today that discrimination against the infected people retards our progress in the fight against the spread of this dreadful disease.

Collectively, our role as citizens should be the promotion of prevention means, access to treatment, care and support for People Living with HIV and their families.

Let me hasten to suggest that from my colleagues and comrade MECs who are present here today and who have gracefully honoured our Candlelight Memorial Day, we humbly need the following:

From the Honourable MEC for Education (Baba Macingwana): we need gardens at schools through more health-promoting schools. We have health-promoting schools across the province but we need an exponential increment in every District and Region.

From the Honourable MEC for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Development (Mama Johnson): we need gardens at homes for people who are infected to access fresh vegetables for their compromised immune system. In this instance I suggest small garden patches for the homes and big communal lands for community-oriented garden plots

From the Honourable MEC for Social Development (Baba Bhungane): we need food parcels for now but later gardens must be there. The food parcels assist our people with social relief measures. The gardens will teach our people not to beg, but learn to fish for the rest of their lives.

From me as MEC for Health: I pledge the cultivation of gardens in clinics and hospitals for fresh produce from within our own institutions.

Let us remember our departed loved ones, those who have gone before us to be with their Master because of HIV and AIDS. Let us cherish their memories in a way that will teach our children and our children's children that AIDS Kills. UNkulunkulu anibusise! May God bless you all!

I THANK YOU!

