

Speech by KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo on the occasion of the Candlelight Ceremony at the Durban University of Technology

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Programme Director

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Colleagues

Students

It is a great honour indeed to get an opportunity to come and share with you prayers as we all remember the loved ones who departed as a result of HIV and AIDS under the theme: **TOUCHING LIVES**.

As a country we have religiously been commemorating this day since the inception of the campaign in 1983, bringing together people, individuals, organizations, sectors and communities to remember all those we lost.

As a Province, we are the ones who have lost more people and will continue doing so if we, particularly the youth, do not change our way of doing things. Our Honourable Premier, Dr Zweli Mkhize, in His State of the Province Address alluded to this when he said: *“If South Africa is to achieve the goal of a South Africa that is free of*

Tuberculosis, HIV and the stigma surrounding the diseases, KwaZulu-Natal has to lead such a change”.

Dear students, in the spirit of the 2009 theme for the International Candlelight Memorial Campaign, really **“Together, we are the Solution.”**

I am happy for you that you are in an institution that cares about you as demonstrated by the historic development of the opening of the **Isolempilo Campus Health Clinic, which made DUT to be the first campus in KwaZulu-Natal to provide anti-retroviral treatment to students.** Over and above this, you also have the Student Counseling Unit as well as the HIV/ AIDS Centre.

The management of this University fully understands concerns raised by our Honourable Minister of Health, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi when he said:

“...the largest public health problem that faces South Africa today, and which drives many of the other pandemics, and significantly reduces our life expectancy, is HIV/AIDS. The most important task that faces us is to reduce by 50% the number of new HIV infections by 2011/2012 and to initiate on Antiretroviral Treatment (ART) 80% of eligible people living with HIV and AIDS”.

We sincerely thank the leadership of this institution for their insight. We also fully embrace and support other positive awareness efforts initiated here, especially the **graduate alive campaign**. Through all this, we are saying if you are the student of DUT today you have no reason to die needlessly or disappoint your parents and the nation by claiming that you did not have facts or even insinuate that there was no help at hand.

Dear students, working together we can see that AIDS free generation is a possibility. Let us all make it happen; it begins right here, and it begins with you!

Working together with the Management our eThekweni Health District will work to ensure that almost all the 22 500 strong DUT community come forward for HIV testing.

Through **HIV testing and counselling**, those who are negative will know and be encouraged to develop means to remain negative. Those found to be positive will get the help offered and begin to live a healthy and positive life.

Through HIV testing and counseling, we will all ensure that all those eligible for Antiretroviral Treatment are identified and put on the programme as early as dictated by the status of their CD 4 count and viral load.

Programme Director, the time has come for all of us to be open about HIV and AIDS.

We need to caution and warn each other about the dangers of:

- early sexual debut,
- sex with multiple sexual partners,
- unprotected sex
- substance and drug abuse leading to unprotected sex
- tendencies of promiscuity and
- being involved with SUGAR DADDIES

Speaking of SUGGAR DADDIES, I would like to share with you results emanating from a study conducted by the **Centre for the AIDS Programme of Research in South Africa (CAPRISA)** which says:

'One of the most striking features of the HIV epidemic in South Africa is the stark differences in age and gender distribution of HIV infection. In South Africa, more than 20% of pregnant women aged 15– 24 years attending prenatal clinics are infected with HIV, and overall, about 76% of HIV infected young people aged 15–24 are women.. HIV prevalence is highest in teenage girls while it is low in teenage boys, with prevalence rates rising in men about 5-7 years later than in women.'

What this says is that girl students must be more vigilant as they are more susceptible to incur HIV than boys because of HIV positive older men preying on them.

Our boy students must also do every thing to protect themselves by heeding His Majesty's call of **Medical Male Circumcision (MMC)**. They must note that as a Province we have embarked on a massive circumcision project that will span over a period of five years ensuring that every sexually active man is circumcised including those in prisons as well as schools like we have done even here at DUT and at the University of Zululand.

We all have to play our part in ridding our land the scourge of HIV and AIDS.

Remember, through this Candle Light Ceremony, we are here to humble and solemnly remember our loved ones who perished as a result of HIV and AIDS. Let us cherish their memories in a way that will teach us; teach our children and our children's children that AIDS Kills.

Through the ceremony we also aim at:

- Providing care and support to those living with and/or affected by HIV and AIDS,

- Promoting access to prevention, treatment, care and support for People Living with HIV and their families, as well as,
- Fighting the stigma

Always heed the message we got from our Honourable President, uMsholozzi during the 2009 World AIDS Day that says:

I AM RESPONSIBLE...

- I must take responsibility for my own health and HIV status;
- if I am HIV negative, to stay negative,
- if I am HIV positive, to seek support and services to ensure I am healthy and don't spread the virus to others, be they partners or children

All of us can and must be leaders in this regard. We owe it to our children and all of the next generations to come.

I wish you luck and success in your studies.

Let's live long! Akungajahwa!

I thank you.