

**Speech by KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo on the occasion of the celebration for the return of initiates from circumcision camps in the Greater Kokstad Sub District**

**13 January 2012**

Ndabezitha – Inkosi Chiliza, Chair of Sisonke Local House

Sisonke District Mayor – Cllr Ndobe

Greater Kokstad Municipality Mayor - Cllr Nxumalo and all Councillors

Traditional Surgeon – Mr Khomo

Traditional Initiation Committee – Indlondlo

MMC Provincial Co-ordinator - Dr Sandile Tshabalala

Health District Manager – Mrs Gcina Radebe

District and Local AIDS Councils

Abazali kanye nawo onke amalunga emindeni

Esihlangene ngabo

Malunga omphakathi ahloniphekile

I profusely want to thank the Traditional Initiation Committee; Indlondlo and the Traditional Leaders as well as the local leadership for the guidance and support they have given to this initiative aimed at saving lives and making real men out of this generation of young men.

We all know that since the launch of the circumcision custom by His Majesty in April 2010, Sisonke district is amongst the two districts that have been lagging behind in terms of the uptake as attested to by only **417** circumcisions that were done by the end of September 2010.

We are all elated that our District Manager, Mrs Gcina Radebe as well as our Provincial Male Medical Circumcision (MMC) Programme Coordinator, Dr Sandile Tshabalala took an initiative to investigate the reasons for the poor uptake and to also market and popularise the programme in this community.

Programme Director, our interface with the Indlondlo and Traditional Leadership last year made us to understand a number of issues including the fact that there was circumcision taking place within the Kokstad community, done in the traditional way as part of initiation process done to all males.

We also learnt that the community of Greater Kokstad that practises the tradition was concerned with the way the Department and other stakeholders openly and "carelessly" discussed the tradition and allowed women to participate in traditional men's only tradition.

Through this interaction we also got to know of the community's fear that the Department and other stakeholder would want to take over the tradition, which would have led to the loss of the values and impact of the tradition on their men

We were also appraised by the Indlondlo that they considered initiation as a broader concept than just MMC, that to this community it also

focuses on the moral regeneration aimed at transforming an individual from boyhood to manhood

Most importantly, we learnt that the transition from boyhood to manhood is a responsibility not only of the individual but also the family, the community leadership (traditional, religious, political) and all significant others. This means that if one wants to change any moral behaviour, all relevant stakeholders should be given room to participate. The richness of the behavioural change was also enhanced by the presence of the older brothers to initiates who act as mentors for the boys.

The Department of Health then realised that there was a need to explore working together with the Indlondlo as this would result in all parties learning from each other.

We also realized that through this association and interaction, we were going to be able to introduce HIV reduction concepts which we discovered were missing.

Most importantly we also observed that infection control standards needed to be introduced in the execution of the custom in order to reduce or prevent any possible infections or complications.

Programme Director, today we are able to report on positive strides already accomplished by this collaboration:

- The Department through EG Usher Memorial Hospital is now participating in the initiation process by providing services such as HCT to the initiates that would be in the initiation for six week.

- The hospital is also sterilizing the pre- packed the equipment (traditionally used and other surgical sundries), that are used during the initiation.
- The hospital Management is also allocating three male representatives that focus on infection prevention and control and observation of initiates throughout the process.

Ladies and gentlemen, as I have indicated, this is a very proud moment for all of us, a repeat of what happened last year during the Umkhosi wokubuya Entabeni where we were invited to join the Greater Kokstad community in welcoming the initiates back from the mountain. This was a milestone indeed as we welcomed **219 initiates**.

During that event we were highly impressed when we witnessed the newly crowned men committing themselves to Healthy living and professing to carry out traits of discipline and acceptable behaviour. In that event we also witnessed the families and the community committing themselves to supporting the young men in their journey to manhood.

Today, Programme Director we wish to report on progress made thus far but focus on new developments pertaining to the 3 traditional Male Circumcision camps that took place in the Greater Kokstad Municipality for 2012.

Foremost we wish to recognise and thank **Mr Khomo** in his role as the **Traditional Surgeon** for all the success that is being witness in the performance of circumcision initiatives taking here in the Greater Kokstad Regions. We highly appreciate his prowess in this field, it does

really show that he devoted his time training in the Eastern Cape in the use of a Gomco machine and is indeed quite conversant with the Infection Control issues. This knowledge has made it easier for Mr Khomo to master the use of Tara Klamp which was extensively used in the current camps.

Programme Director, it will be remembered that when His Majesty the King called for revival of the circumcision practice, He emphasised the Medical aspect and as such in all our involvements we have followed this to the latter hence even with the current **223 initiates** we started by assembling them at EG Usher hospital for HCT. The hospital also provided the lingcibi with Infection Control material and Human Resources support.

Today we are assembled to welcome all the young men who successfully underwent the initiation process constituted under these under mentioned categories:

Group	No. of Initiates	Departure date	Return date
AmaXhosa	79	18 November 2011	06 January 2012
Abesuthu	87	25 November 2011	30 December 2011
AmaHlubi	57	26 November 2011	31 December 2011
<b>Total</b>	<b>223</b>		

It is important to note that of the 223 initiates, 144 being the Basotho and AmaHlubi who went through the Tara Klamp applied by the "Traditional Surgeon". Again, there were no complications and amputations in these camps, with just one exception of an initiate who was sent to EG Usher Hospital for assessment and management.

We are here today to thank these young men for taking up this great initiative. We are also here to inform you that HIV is one of the greatest challenges facing South Africa today with an estimated 5.2 million people (10.6% of population) infected. Our Province accounts for 25.8% of South Africa's total infections.

Having gone through the Camps, we want to inform you that MMC does indeed reduce the risk of men acquiring HIV infection by 60 percent. It should be understood that this protective effect against HIV is only partial, that the medical male circumcision is an additional preventive measure and is not a substitute for other proven HIV prevention methods.

Our intention for coming here is to request you to hold steadfast on all the teachings that you got from both the leaders and your peers and ensure that you remain HIV negative for the rest of you lives. This will be accomplished only when you stick to the following:

- Delay primary sexual debut
- Do not get involved in the reckless practice of having multiple partners
- Promote the correct and consistent use of condoms
- Refrain from alcohol and substance abuse
- Respect and project women

Through you we would like to reduce mortality and morbidity due to HIV and AIDS and other STIs. We also want to protect our women folk as MMC does provide an indirect benefit to them by reducing the number of men who are HIV-infected, thereby decreasing male-to-female HIV transmission.

Lastly, I wish to thank all the people who have contributed in making the whole event from its inception a resounding success. Your participation and collaboration has demonstrated that it is possible for the government, traditional leadership and communities to work together in shaping human behaviour.

Let us continue to work together to ensure a Long and Healthy Life for All.

I thank you