

**Opening remarks by KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo  
on the occasion of the PEPFAR and KZN health Department  
of Health Workshop at Grey's Hospital**

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Programme Director – Dr S Mndaweni

USA Consular General – Hon Taylor Ruggles

KZN Health Head of Department – Dr Sibongile Zungu

Partners in Health

Colleagues

Ladies and gentlemen

We are indeed fortunate to have PEPFAR as an ally in our quest to rid this country the scourge of HIV and AIDS. We are also thankful that your involvement and support is result oriented as it is aimed at improving effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of our country's HIV and TB response.

Through this partnership, we are also working in a quantifiable way to ensure the attainment of:

- Zero to new HIV and TB infections, as well as,
- Increasing the life expectancy and improvement of the quality of life for those living with and affected by HIV and TB

Colleagues, this is no easy feat considering that South Africa accounts for 17% of the global burden of HIV infection with an estimated 5.7 million people living with HIV and AIDS.

It is also known that in South Africa, the number of babies born annually is approximately 1,200,000<sup>1</sup> and that in 2009 the HIV prevalence among pregnant women was 29.3%<sup>2</sup>, which then translated to almost 360,000 babies born exposed to HIV. Yes, without the assistance of any intervention, approximately 30% (around 108,000) of these babies would become infected with HIV.

So today as we converge to this PEPFAR and Department workshop we are pleased to acknowledge and congratulate each other on noticeable and quantifiable progress made particularly in as far as the implementation of the Prevention of Mother To Child Transmission is concern.

We are very excited that the 2010 MRC and National Department of Health National PMTCT Survey has shown that the KZN PMTCT programme has had the greatest impact in averting the mother to child transmission of HIV around six weeks postpartum. It reveals that even though the province had the highest percentage of HIV exposed babies at 43.9% but that it had an MTCT rate of 2.8% which is below the National MTCT rate which was at 3.5%.

Colleagues, this indeed is a resounding achievement which we should all be proud of as it shows that much as the province has the highest HIV prevalence in the country, our PMTCT programme is highly functional.

We are thankful to all our partners and stakeholders who have worked and continue to do so in ensuring that all eligible pregnant women are initiated on HAART.

We are also very appreciative of the support given in ensuring that President Zuma's 2009 World Aids Day call is acted upon and actualized in as far as it refers to the initiation of AZT at 14 weeks of pregnancy for clients with a CD4 count below 350 and initiation of HAART for clients with a CD4 count below 200. The progress observed in this sphere

We have also succeeded in attending to the exposed babies by providing them with NVP stat dose for the duration of the breastfeeding period.

Success that comes as a result of this solid partnership and commitment with PEPFAR is also noticeable and appreciated in other related spheres as they relate to:

- Persons receiving antiretroviral treatment

- HIV-positive individuals who receive care and support (including TB/HIV)
- Orphans and vulnerable children receiving support, and
- Multitude of individuals receiving counselling and testing

Programme Director, we are not blind to the global economic crises faced by major world powers with its devastating consequences to developing economies.

We are also cognizant of the fact that assessment and realignment of priorities of the donor countries is inevitable.

What we are saying as a Province that is mired by the highest prevalence of both HIV and TB is that let us not be forsaken especially at a time when tangible positive results are showing.

PEFPAR support has been and continues to be a lifeline for the millions of the deserving infected and affected individuals in this Province.

Let us find a way of sustaining this partnership aimed eradicating this epidemic that is affecting health, livelihoods, economic growth, demographic futures, as well as impacting on the lives of individuals and families. A scourge indeed!

Working together we will achieve more.