

**Speech by KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo to highlight concerns
on the abuse of Skin Lighteners in South Africa**

26 August 2016

All Protocol observed

Programme Director

On learning about this event, I got reminded of questions that **Malcom X**, one of the leading figures in the American Civil Movements, posed to his fellow country men and women, when he said:

'Who taught you to hate the texture of your hair?

Who taught you to hate the color of your skin? To such extent you bleach, to get to look like the white man.

Who taught you to hate the shape of your nose and the shape of your lips? Who taught you to hate yourself from the top of your head to the soles of your feet?

Who taught you to hate your own kind? Who taught you to hate the race that you belong to so much so that you don't want to be around each other?'

I am thus very delighted that today we have decided to combine our efforts to fight the use of one of the unnecessary but harmful ointment and cream vanities.

Over decades we have seen people blemished and disfigured especially amongst the African and Indian groups due to the use of skin lighteners. Wrong notions were being promoted to the effect that to be Black, especially if you were particularly dark, was loaded with negative stereotypes. The implication was that natural physical traits of blackness were defective; whiteness was now the norm for Blacks to emulate

Several products, promising miraculous transformations, were then manufactured and marketed specifically to the Black community. Consequently many Black women and Black men have mutilated their bodies and have even died because they used products, containing harsh chemicals that promised peace of mind in a bottle.

We are thus happy that today the Department of Dermatology at UKZN; the KZN Department of Health; the Cosmetics Toiletries and Fragrances Association (CTFA); the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA); the Dermatology Society of South Africa (DSSA); the Women's Dermatological Society of SA (WDS) as well as the Students Representative Council (SRC) have joined forces to dispel all the myths about the need to even start lightening your skin.

Our main objective today and beyond is to educate and increase awareness about the harmful short term and long-term side effects of using skin lightening products on the skin.

Research has demonstrated that the greatest users of skin lightening agents in South Africa are from African and Indian communities. Whilst use was predominantly noted amongst females in the past, males are also showing an increased interest in use of these products. *Amadoda aya creamer!!*

The use of these skin lightening products also cuts across all age groups varying from teenagers, adolescents, middle age women and elderly women. Both rural, suburban, lower socio economic and middle class groups are culprits and hooked into this false beauty.

Indeed, what we are dealing with goes back to the era of colonialism with its bad and damaging influence that said white and whiteness was pure; sacred and beautiful.

It is time our populace get to know that here we are dealing with products that may contain harmful chemicals that come by themselves or in combination of steroid, hydroquinone, mercury, phenol and its derivatives and or resorcinol. Today we have to let our people know the **ADVERSE EFFECTS OF THESE SKIN LIGHTENERS**, which are:

- Skin cancer
- Making yourself susceptible to skin infections
- Skin thinning
- Uneven skin tone with increased pigmentation
- Stretch marks
- Increased in appearance and thickness of skin vessels
- Increase in hair growth at sites of application
- Ochronosis (irreversible greyish pigmentation)
- Kidney and neurological problems(mercury)

We also call upon all Law Enforcement Agencies to play their roles in enforcing legislation and monitoring of illegal importation of banned skin creams.

The Business Sector Associations also has to show its caring and progressive ethos calling upon all their members to remove of all the banned skin lightening creams from their shelves in supermarkets, vendors, pharmacies and spice shops.

To the manufacturers, we demand that they stick to the strict guidelines and legislation that governs the sale of products which are meant for treating pigmentation.

Again, we reaffirm confidence and pride in oneself and declare that skin bleaching represents a profound, yet subliminal hatred of one's self.

It is time indigenous Africans and Indians embrace natural beauty and love the skin they are in.

I thank you

