



**Ministry of Health and Social Services**

**DRAFT**  
**KEYNOTE SPEECH**

BY THE:

HON. MINISTER OF HEALTH and SOCIAL SERVICES,  
DR. RICHARD NCHABI KAMWI MP,

AT

THE 10<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF THE AFRICA REGIONAL CERTIFICATION  
COMMISSION FOR THE ERADICATION OF POLIO

21<sup>ST</sup> OCTOBER 2008

SAFARI COURT HOTEL and CONFERENCE CENTRE

WINDHOEK,

NAMIBIA.

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Director of ceremony, Mr. K. Kahuure, Permanent Secretary of MoHSS,  
Members of the Africa Regional Certification Commission,  
Representatives from Regional Office of WHO,  
The WHO Country Representative, Dr. Magda Robalo,  
UNICEF Country Representative Mr. Ian McLeod,  
Distinguished members from the National Polio Expert & Certification Committees  
including the National Task Force for Laboratory Containment,  
Members of the Inter Agency Coordinating Committee,  
Representatives of the Medical Association/Medical Board,  
Representatives of UN Agencies and Development Partners,  
Colleagues from other Ministries and the Ministry of Health and Social Services,  
Invited guests from different Pharmaceutical companies,  
Members of the Media,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure and I feel honoured to welcome you all at this historic event, the 10<sup>th</sup> annual general meeting of the Africa Regional Certification Commission (ARCC) on Polio Eradication. I also would like to thank the World Health Organization Regional Office for Africa for choosing Namibia to host this very important meeting. Gatherings such as this one place a spotlight on our joint work on the African continent towards Polio Eradication in particular and child health in general. Such meetings also accord good opportunities for updating and exchanging experience on important steps related to Polio Eradication in Africa.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am pleased to welcome the Africa Regional Certification Commission of Polio Eradication to Namibia. It is this month 30 years ago that health leaders of the world

gathered in Alma Ata to agree on the Alma Ata Declaration on Primary Health Care. Equitable access to vaccination in order to help eradicate the main childhood killer diseases is one of the eight basic elements of primary health care. Also, 20 years ago, in 1988 Health Ministers of the world passed the resolution for Polio Eradication at the world health assembly in Geneva, Switzerland. A lot of progress has been made on this resolution during the past two decades. The evidence of this we are going to witness at this important conference.

During the next few days, the ARCC, which is an independent panel of very eminent Commissioners of the international public health experts will take a decision on the performance towards Polio Eradication of selected African countries represented here namely, Eritrea, Burkina Faso, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali and Namibia. Chairpersons of each of the National Certification Committees (NCC) will present their Polio documentation reports to the commission and based on its deliberations and assessment Polio free status may be declared.

Director of Ceremony,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

For any country to meet the global Polio Free Certification Standard a number of important criteria must be met. Firstly, surveillance, that means the system to pick-up or detect any Polio case that may have been imported into the country, must be up and running effectively. This means that amongst others:

- The detection of at least 1 non-Polio acute flaccid paralysis (AFP) case per 100,000 population under 15years of age,
- Stool specimen adequacy in at least 80% of AFP cases;
- At least 80% timeliness and completeness of reporting in surveillance from the health districts to National surveillance office

I hereby would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all the countries present here today. You would not have been invited to this meeting of the Commission, if

you had not already met these criteria, so you did do a very good job!! Please give yourself a big round of applause.

In addition, it is also a requirement that countries must have established firstly, a National Polio Expert Committee (NPEC), secondly, a National Certification Committee (NCC) and thirdly, a National Task Force for wild Polio virus containment (NTF). To all the members of these committees I want to say that your commitment and dedication towards your country achieving and maintaining Polio Free Status is greatly appreciated and acknowledged. Please keep up your very good and very important work!

Ladies and Gentlemen

Our main challenge today, around the world, is to ensure that Wild Polio Virus transmission is interrupted in those few remaining countries where the virus is still endemic. The danger is that any country's population may be re-infected with Polio as a result of importation.

However, there are many good signs, that we are making excellent progress. In this regard, it is important to note that routine immunization coverage is improving in the African region. We trust that, with hard work and much support from many dedicated stakeholders, that these levels can be sustained. But we may not rest or become complacent. Improving routine immunization coverage must remain a high priority in our respective countries.

We must focus on innovative and effective strategies to ensure that all susceptible children are reached and vaccinated. We must ensure that our communities accept and fully participate in all the efforts applied by government and our partners, in order to firstly eliminate and later eradicate all vaccine preventable diseases.

There is no doubt that the oral Polio vaccine is one of the most effective vaccines when it comes to reduction of childhood illnesses and deaths. Similarly, more efficacious vaccines are becoming available globally, which we need to integrate into our national expanded programmes on immunization so that we can keep on making progress in our quest to reduce infant and child mortality.

Director of Ceremony,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

The ministry of health and social services in collaboration with our partners in health such as WHO, UNICEF, other development partners and many stakeholders and friends from the civil society and private sector, strives for a Namibia in which children enjoy the highest possible level of health. We need to achieve our Vision 2030 and build a Namibia that fulfills the needs, rights and aspirations of our children and that enables them to live and thrive so that they may achieve their fullest potential.

Director of Ceremonies, we in the African region can eradicate Polio; if other regions in the world have done it, so can we. Maintaining and sustaining certification-level surveillance and containment are possible. They require the continued commitments from national governments and all partners and stakeholders. These continued efforts will be necessary to ensure the global interruption of Polio transmission and guard against any reemergence of Poliovirus until such a day that the World Health Organization declares that the Polio Virus has been fully eradicated from the world!

Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

During this week the Commission will have detailed discussion with every country team here present. Countries will be updated on various aspects concerning their efforts to

date. On behalf of the Namibian Government I want to encourage the Commission to be frank and to the point. Let us know where we do well. But also do not hesitate to clearly point out where we must further improve. Namibia, for one, will take your valuable input as positive and facilitative so that we can further improve on identified areas.

Distinguished guests I am convinced that your stay will be of great value in our collective effort to eradicate childhood diseases on the African continent.

Director of Ceremonies,

Distinguished Guests, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, on behalf of the Namibia Ministry of Health and Social Services and all our esteemed immunization partners I would like to assure my country's continued commitment to the fight against vaccine preventable diseases and improving the health of our most vulnerable and yet the hope for our future, our children.

On this note, I declare this meeting officially open and wish you all success.

I thank you for your attention.