



Republic of Namibia

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

**DR. RICHARD NCHABI KAMWI, MP
MINISTER OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE FIRST
NATIONAL HIV TESTING DAY IN NAMIBIA
ZOO PARK**

**9th May 2008
Windhoek**

Programme Director

Honorable Ministers

Honorable Members of Parliament

Hon. Governor for Khomas Region – Cde. S. Shaningwa

H.E. Gail Dennise Mathieu - American Ambassador

Your Excellencies Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Esteemed Representatives of United Nations Agencies

Distinguished Invited Guests

Senior Government Officials

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am most humbled to address you on this important day, the First Namibian National Counseling and Testing Day. This day marks an important milestone in our collective fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

The first HIV infection was reported in Namibia in 1986. By March 2007, there were about 195, 000 Namibians living with HIV infection.

Regrettably, approximately 7,100 Namibians died of AIDS related causes in Namibia last year alone. This is indeed a significant number and one which is a cause of much concern to all of us.

In response, Government has put in place aggressive programmes including the Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission Services, Anti Retroviral Therapy, and Voluntary Counseling and Testing in all the 13 Regions. We are now in the process of rolling out ARV services to clinic level.

The National Testing Day (NTD) forms an integral part of the Ministry's disease management strategy which amongst other things, seek to scale up prevention efforts and focuses on the involvement of all Namibians.

This day presents a rare opportunity for people nationwide to:

1. learn about their status; and
2. gain new insights into how to assist those who are infected and affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic,
3. as well as creating HIV competent communities that will curtail the spread of HIV.

Programme Director

There are a number of specific objectives that we hope to have achieved by the end of the NTD which are as follow:

1. provide 12 000 people the opportunity to get tested and learn about their status;
2. refer those who test positive to care, treatment and support services available at most health facilities nearest to them;
3. disseminate HIV prevention and care (ABC & BCC) messages, brochures, condoms, etc. to the public;
4. monitor the uptake of VCT services before, during and after the NTD.

The NTD also provides an invaluable opportunity to dispel the myths and stigma associated with HIV testing and to reach those who have never been tested or who have engaged in high risk behaviour since their last test.

The NTD campaign is targeting the 15 – 49 years old population with specific messages for men, women and young people. It is however important to note that the NTD campaign is not limited to these age groups only. Those above or below the afore mentioned

age group are equally encouraged to make themselves available for VTC. However children under the age of 15 years will only be allowed to go for VCT if they are accompanied by their parents or guardians.

Programme Director, Ladies and gentlemen

I would like to assure you that HIV testing and counseling services provided during this day will be strictly voluntary and anonymous. The benefits of knowing one's HIV status are well known. HIV testing is an entry point to access anti-retroviral treatment. Indeed, a person is only enrolled for ARV treatment when he or she is tested and found HIV positive and when he or she is eligible for treatment. We have overwhelming evidence that antiretroviral therapy has dramatically improved the quality of life for many infected people and has lessen the burden of care for the affected family members.

I am grateful to announce that there are now fewer HIV related patients in the wards than was the case five years ago. We see those who come on stretcher beds, fighting for their lives get back to work and join their families in good health.

However, only about 65% of the women folk who were tested positive are receiving care and treatment services. Whereas, only about 35% of HIV positive men are partaking in these services. Thus, I call upon my male colleagues to join our women folks in order for men to benefit from the same.

Programme Director, ladies and gentlemen, the Ministry of Health and Social Services has organized for National Voluntary Counseling and Testing in Caprivi, Erongo, Karas, Khomas and Oshana Regions to be held today, the 9th May 2008.

To show the significance of this day, the Ministry of Health and Social Services has decided to declare 9th May as the National HIV Testing Day on the Health Calender.

Programme Director, I wish to use this opportunity to thank our Development partners in particular the USA Government through PEPFAR and USAID, the Global Fund for HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria and our technical Team from the World Health Organisation Country office for the support.

I now have the honour to invite fellow Namibians between the age groups of 15 – 49 years old in Caprivi, Erongo, Karas, Khomas and Oshana Regions who made their choices to join me for VCT services.

Namibia gets tested. Be part of it.

I thank you.