



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

By

*Dr Nchabi Richard Kamwi, MP
Minister of Health and Social Services*

At the

**Inauguration of the St Mary's Odibo Health Centre
CDC Clinic**

3 July 2009

Odibo, Oshangwena Region

Programme Directors, Hon. Nghiyavelwa Nambinga & Mr. Robson Hainana
Hon. Regional Governor, Cde. Usko Nghaamwa
His Grace, Bishop Shihala Hamupembe
The Anglican Diocesan Bishop Nathaniel Ndaxuma Nakwambah
The Regional Director for MoHSS, Ms. Kaino Pohamba
The Chief Medical Officer, PMO
The Nursing Managers and Administration Support Staff
Distinguished invited guests
Members of the Media
Ladies and Gentlemen

Namibia recently hosted a successful 2009 HIV/AIDS Implementers meeting, where the experts on the subject reflected on what has been done to treat, care and support those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS and to prevent new infections to occur.

Similarly, Namibia had a rare privilege to host the Champions for an HIV-free Generation after the HIV/AIDS Implementers meeting. At these meetings Namibia was congratulated for its exceptional leadership and commitment to the health of its citizens. We were informed about the major strides in the response to HIV/AIDS including the quick roll out and universal coverage of life-saving treatment to people living with the HIV virus, the expansive coverage of the Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission Programme and in providing the social safety nets necessary for the care of people infected and affected by this scourge.

Programme Director,

This is in line with the promises made by the SWAPO Party Manifesto of 2004 and to ensure that the objective of health for all Namibians is met with in line with Vision 2030. This cannot be done by the Ministry alone, henceforth, the partners in this case the

Anglican Medical Services. As a result, I commend the establishment of an ART Clinic “Ediva lOmwenyo” at St. Mary’s Health Centre.

In this regard, I wish to use this opportunity, to thank the visionary Church Leadership in this country for the pivotal role they played before and during independence to this end in addressing the health of all Namibians.

Your Grace, Bishop Rt. Rev. Nathaniel Nakwatumba representing the Church Membership at this occasion, we thank you for not only caring for the spiritual needs of the community but that the Church Leadership were also mindful of their health needs. We shall for ever remain indebted for your immense efforts in complementing Government. Indeed, when the final history of Namibia is written the Anglican Church in Odibo will stand head and shoulder as having contributed immensely to the welfare of the people of Namibia during those critical years of the struggle for the freedom of Namibia.

Your Grace, as you may recall on the 2nd October, 2008 we signed the Standard Agreement of Partnership in Health between the MoHSS and Anglican Diocese of Namibia, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia and Roman Catholic Church. On that day Government represented by myself, had agreed to fund the construction of health facilities shared on a basis of 95% MoHSS and 5% by the Churches and or 100% on either side when funds will be made available.

I am glad that we are gathered here to witness the official Inauguration of the newly build CDC Clinic, funded by Intra-Health International in collaboration with the MoHSS following the Agreement.

Programme Director,

I am adamant that, with all this good news said about Namibia, HIV transmission is still spreading country wide. For example, the HIV sero prevalence of 20.1% for Engela district is exceptionally high for a population of 17 000 people. This is indeed worrisome! What are the drivers of this epidemic?

According to SADC reports of 2006, multiple concurrent partnerships have been identified as an important contributor to the high levels of HIV across the Southern African Region. In Namibia, high levels of concurrent relationships and rapid turnover of partners amongst certain sub-groups of the population have been documented, and are most likely significant contributors to the epidemic.

Other contributory factors include alcohol abuse, as it contributes to the spread of HIV/AIDS by increasing sexual risk behaviours. Throughout Namibia, several surveys have consistently found positive correlations between the frequency of alcohol consumptions and having multiple concurrent partners.

Similarly, inter-generational sex is another contributory factor in the further spread of HIV infection. For example, according to the National Demographic Health Survey 2006, it revealed that inter-generational sex in Namibia is associated with high levels of STIs and having multiple partners. These partners introduce the virus into the younger generation where it quickly spreads as a result of rapid partner turnover and common concurrent partnerships.

Clearly, if we are to make an impact in order to turn-around the strategy for further spread of HIV, we need to consider the prevention strategies.

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The major strategy that we learned from the two meetings concluded in Windhoek, was the promotion of prevention and prevention and prevention strategy. Prevention of HIV must be priority number one. A strategy that focuses on comprehensive prevention targets the underlining codes of the epidemic and has the greatest potential to reduce the scope of the problem.

Therefore, we need to break the trajectory of the epidemic by stopping new HIV infections. This means focusing on prevention for a HIV-free generation.

In this regard, I commend the Church to continue with their concept of abstinence. The Church, as the custodian of moral behaviour change should continue with this noble course.

There is also a need for family members in particular the parents to create a conducive environment for discussions, dialogue and strengthening of skills which would greatly enhance the childrens understanding of the risks and the ability to advert these risks.

The other strategy that we may consider is male circumcision. Namibia practices male circumcision in certain groups, however there is wide variation in circumcision rates by region. The observation is that where circumcision is most common for example Omaheke, Kunene and Otjozondjupa have recorded relatively low prevalence of HIV according to sentinel surveillance. Conversely, some of the regions along the northern border reporting high HIV prevalence such as, Caprivi, Ohangwena, Oshana, Oshikoto and Omusati have relatively low levels of circumcision. As a result, the MoHSS is

promoting male circumcision as one of the preventive measures. I wish to appeal to the Church to consider promoting this strategy in their noble mission.

Programme Director, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I mentioned earlier that the ART Clinic for St Mary's Health Centre was built with the support of Intra-Health International in collaboration with the MoHSS. Therefore, I wish to use this opportunity on behalf of Government, the people of Oshikango Constituency, Ohangwena Region and indeed myself to thank Intra-Health International for this gesture of good will.

However, Ediva lOmwenyo will only meet the intended objective for what this facility was established only, when the clients will have an access to lifesaving medicines.

It is important to know your epidemic. There is no way we can make wise investments if we do not know our epidemic.

As important as knowing your epidemic is "knowing your status". I would like to encourage all of you to get tested, couples to get tested, young and old to get tested. I encourage my male folks, please let us get tested.

Last but not least, is "taking control of your own life, whether you are HIV positive or negative". I know it is easier said than done, but determination is the starting point. Take control; do not let HIV/AIDS control you. We can and should control HIV/AIDS.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge with thanks the support of the Global Fund and the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) initiative, which emphasize results.

Programme Director, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I now have the honour to declare the St. Mary's Odibo Health Centre CDC Clinic officially opened.

Thank you!