



KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY:

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MINISTER OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

AT THE WORLD MALARIA DAY COMMEMORATIONS

25 APRIL 2008

Omuthiya Gwiipundi Constituency, Oshikoto region

Programme Director, Ms. M. Kavezembi
Regional Councillor for Onayena, Hon. Cde Nekongo
His Majesty King Kauluma Elifas
WHO Officer, Dr. Desta Tiruneh
UNICEF Representative, Ms. Madhavi Ashok
Partners in Roll Back Malaria
Officials of Ministry of Health and Social Services
Members of the Media
Invited Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

Allow me to join Cde Nekongo in welcoming you to Omuthiya, Oshikoto Region. Namibia joins the rest of the world in commemorating the First World Malaria Day. In May 2007 the World Health Assembly, where Namibia is a member state, met in Geneva, Switzerland and resolved among others that this day be annually commemorated as World Malaria Day. Malaria is one of major killer diseases in the world claiming one million lives annually. On the African continent malaria claims more than 900,000 lives a year, ranking as the third major killer to HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis.

I am pleased to report that with the phasing out of the cheap Chloroquine with Artemether lumefanterine and the persistent use of 75% DDT indoor residual spraying, the number of Malaria cases has been decreasing since 2004 and reached a very low level in 2007. Indeed, a similar trend was observed in relation to mortality for the same years. As a result, WHO proposed that Namibia be one of the countries that can achieve Malaria elimination.

One of the contributory factors to this proposal is the demographic positioning of our country where Malaria is only endemic in the northern regions of the country with a seasonal transmission pattern.

Programme Director

Notwithstanding, it was because Malaria was proving to be such a deadly and rampant disease that the World Health Assembly decided to address the impact of malaria and bring it to a controllable level. This they chose to do by creating awareness among the general public by providing relevant information on the magnitude of malaria, the epidemiology, informing the communities about the signs and symptoms of malaria, and insisting on the importance of early diagnosis and prompt treatment.

What are the signs and symptoms of Malaria?

Malaria symptoms include fever with one or more of the following: rigors and chills, loss of appetite, vomiting, headache, general body malaise, and diarrhea. In children in addition to these symptoms, one may observe general irritability, excessive crying, and coughing.

However, Malaria can be prevented through the following measures: sleeping under treated mosquito nets to protect ourselves from mosquito bites; wearing long-sleeved shirts during the night; having our houses sprayed with insecticides that kill mosquitoes; taking chemoprophylaxis when travelling to Malaria endemic areas; and using mosquito repellent.

Therefore, for us to realise effective Malaria control as a SADC member state, it calls for border collaboration on control measures for Malaria. Clearly, *Anopheline* mosquitoes do not know of international borders, nor do they carry passports as is the case with human beings.

In addition to monitoring the disease status and prevention and treatment interventions across borders, there is also a need that both the drugs and chemicals are reviewed and monitored in order to control drug and insecticide resistance.

Programme Director,

It is important to note how global climate change also affects the prevalence and spread of a disease such as Malaria. We have all read through print and electronic media about the hurricanes, for example Hurricane Katrina in the American Region, and other extreme weather phenomenon in other parts of the world. These climatic changes contribute negatively to disease burden. For example, heavy floods and rainfall may change the mosquito breeding grounds bringing them and Malaria to areas where there had been none before. Given the conducive environment and humidity for both mosquito breeding and survival of Malaria parasites, Malaria may thus be transferred from one area to another.

In response to the disease burden, Government through the Ministry of Health and Social Services, has put in place a Malaria control programme guided by National Vector-borne Disease Control. The mainstay of the programme is Malaria case management and vector control.

Indeed, while we commemorate World Malaria Day, let us mobilise community based activities for the prevention and control of Malaria. There is need to approach malaria control through a multi-sectoral approach encompassing the public and private sectors, development partners, NGOs, the Church, and regional and local authorities.

There is a need to educate the community on the importance of indoor residual spraying and inform them of the marked benefits thereof. Always remember the WHO recommendation on the importance of coverage; that for indoor residual spraying to be effective, there is need to achieve a minimum of 80% spray coverage. It is worrisome that the spray coverage in some regions stand below 80%. I therefore urge health officials, especially the health promotion teams, to work closely with community leaders. Note that spraying of houses is meant to reduce the number of mosquitoes resting indoors, and thereby preventing Malaria transmission.

Programme Director

I note with concern that the rainfall in the northern regions with subsequent floods may result in more Malaria cases as there is now a great deal of standing water for mosquito breeding.

As a result, I urge the community members to complement the efforts of Malaria control teams by eliminating mosquito breeding sites through creating landfills close to your houses. Let us guard our environment by clearing empty cans, old tires, bushes and tall grass which may provide resting places for mosquitoes.

Programme Director
Ladies and Gentlemen

While commemorating this Day, let us remember those who died from Malaria in Namibia and the rest of the world. Let us redouble our efforts in the fight against Malaria. Remember Malaria is both preventable and curable. Together we can make a difference.

Thank you.