



**Republic of Namibia**

Opening Remarks

by

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

**On the Occasion of the First Female Conference of Namibian  
Women Leaders on AIDS**

8 May 2009

**P**rogramme Director

**T**he First Lady of Namibia - Madam Penehupifo Pohamba

**H**on Ministers

**H**on Deputy Ministers

**M**embers of Parliament

**H**on Governor of Khomas Region - Cde Sophia Shaningwa

**R**epresentatives of the Diplomatic Corps

**R**epresentatives of United Nations Family Agencies

**C**aptains of Industry

**R**epresentatives of Civil Society

**R**epresentatives of the Media

**L**adies and Gentlemen

It is indeed a great honour for me to welcome you to this historic National Female Conference on HIV/AIDS. I wish to extend a warm welcome to the Namibian First Lady, Madam Penexupifo Pohamba, and wish to express my gratitude to you for demonstrating your continued commitment to the fight against HIV/AIDS, by being with us on this important occasion. Welcome !

## Programme Director

This Conference is historic in that it is the first of its kind ever in Namibia. Let it be historic too in the progress and outcomes it will generate in the fight against HIV and AIDS. The Ministry of Health and Social services is hosting this Conference, and as custodians of health within the Republic of Namibia, the purpose is clear: we are gathered here as women in leadership positions to consult on how you will increase and improve the quality of both male and female involvement in curbing the spread and mitigating the impacts of HIV/AIDS.

There is indeed much in this Conference to look forward to. First and foremost, we are graced by the presence and keynote address of our First Lady, Madam Pohamba. Furthermore, we will be guided through consultations and presentation by experts both in health and female involvements in HIV/AIDS combating initiatives, followed by group work in which you will have the opportunity to openly engage with one another. Indeed, you are here as women to learn, share, and openly consult on best ways in which you and your male counterparts can and must join in the nationwide fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

**A**s you all recall, the first HIV infection was reported in Namibia in 1986 - meaning we are now 22 years in the fight against HIV/AIDS. By March 2007, there were about 195, 000 Namibians living with HIV infection.

**I**n 2007, approximately 7,100 Namibians died of AIDS related causes in Namibia.

**I**n response, Government has put in place aggressive programmes such as the Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission Services, Anti Retroviral Therapy, and Voluntary Counseling and Testing in all the 13 Regions.

**W**hat are the observations?

**T**he observation is that 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. In almost all these services the women folk are not accompanied by their male partners. Therefore, this Conference creates an opportunity for you to encourage and bring along your male partners to partake in these services.

**P**rogramme Director,

**A**llow me to inform the delegates and the nation at large that the Ministry of Health and Social Services has organized the National Voluntary Counseling and Testing in Khomas, Oshana, Erongo, Karas and Caprivi Regions to be held on the 9<sup>th</sup> May 2008. In Khomas Region, the services will be carried out at the Zoo Park.

**I** wish to extend to you all a kind invitation for those of you who may wish to know your status. Please note however, that this is purely voluntary counseling and testing. But we will highly appreciate if many of you will join us and present yourselves for VCT.

**P**rogramme Director, HIV testing is an entry point to access anti-retroviral treatment. Since the inception of the ARV therapy, there are now fewer HIV related patients in the wards.

**T**herefore, this Conference also convened this impressive congregation of women leadership position both in public, private and civil society to address men's scarce involvement in the national activities for HIV/AIDS care, treatment and support, whether it is in VCT, ARV Treatment or in PMTCT programmes. Allow me to reiterate that we see inestimable promise and potential in this Conference.

**W**e all look forward to your meaningful contributions. It is hoped that our deliberations here will indeed prove historic such that in a few years, we will be able to look back and mark this Conference as a decisive turning point in the level, commitment and effect of Namibian's responses to HIV/AIDS.

**I** than you.