



Republic of Namibia

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

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MINISTER OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

AT THE
COMMEMORATION OF WORLD HEALTH DAY

Omuthiya, Oshikoto Region
30 April 2009

Programme Director, Regional Director of Oshikoto region -
Ms. Maria Kavezembi

His Worship the Mayor of Omuthiya Town - Mr. H. Nanyeni

The Chairperson of the Traditional Council –
King Kauluma Elifas

The Hon. Governor of Oshikoto region - Mr. Penda Ndakolo

The Acting WHO Country Representative - Dr. Desta Tiruneh

Directors, Deputy Directors and Senior Officials from the
Ministry of Health and Social Services

Chief Medical Officer - Dr. Noel Siame

Hon. Traditional and Church Leaders

Distinguished Invited Guests

Members of the Press

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am glad to join you and together, we commemorate World Health Day, 2009. Each year on April 7th, the Member States of the WHO celebrates World Health Day, marking the adoption of the World Health Organization (WHO) Constitution. On this day around the globe, thousands of events mark the importance of health for productive and happy lives. The day is commemorated under the technical guidance and in some situations with financial support of the WHO.

In 1948, the WHO held the first World Health Assembly and called for the creation of “World Health Day” to mark the founding of the Organization. Since 1950, World Health Day has been celebrated on the 7th of April annually. Each year, a theme is selected for the Day that highlights a priority area of public health concern. The celebration of each year helps to raise the level of awareness of the world on specific health issues.

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is against this background that the theme for this year’s World Health Day is *“Save lives. Make hospitals safe in emergencies”*. First of all, what is an emergency? Emergencies are situations that demand immediate action and response. Natural events such as floods, hurricanes or earthquakes, and armed conflicts or wars can all lead to public health emergencies. In some situations, outbreaks of disease can also lead to an emergency. For example, a little while ago the WHO

has declared Swine flu as an emergency. The current theme focuses on the safety of health facilities and the readiness of health workers who treat people affected by emergencies. For us in Namibia, this theme could not have come at a better time, given the emergency situation caused by the floods in the northern regions of our country and the threats of possible outbreaks of water- and vector borne diseases.

In times like this, our people will have to depend even more on the health facilities and health workers for survival. Where the facilities are destroyed or services are disrupted during emergencies like this, the suffering of the people become aggravated as they are unable to access much needed care, particularly children, pregnant and lactating mothers, chronically ill patients and the elderly.

Indeed, I am in reference to women who need help during child birth, children who need routine vaccines, and those who need regular treatment for HIV/AIDS or depend on dialysis or surgery to stay alive.

A safe hospital or health clinic that continues to function at optimum capacity during and after a disaster or other emergencies is a safe haven that protects lives. This is what Namibia should strive to ensure is in place in the northern region flood prone areas in particular and throughout the country in general.

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am raising the above, because safe health facilities are a joint responsibility of all sectors or our national development, requiring crucial support to ensure uninterrupted essential lifelines to the citizens. This is the essence of this year's theme and WHO's efforts in this regard to continue to support Member States.

I am grateful to report that the WHO, along with other partners has brought in Emergency and Humanitarian experts who are in the field providing support for the emergency assessment, relief and response. I am reliable informed that through the UN flash appeal to support the Government of Namibia, following declaration of emergency by His Excellency, Hifikepunye Pohamba, the President of Namibia, about USD 900,000 will be disbursed to procure supplies and provide support to health related concerns during the current emergency.

I am glad that the SWAPO Party led Government has continuously ensured that it does not fail its people. In 2008, we have conducted a health and social services system review to reflect on our successes and challenges within the public health sector. This has paved the way for the development of a health strategic plan 2009 – 2013, which I will be launching next week. The proposed personnel and the recommendations therein will all respond to the emergency of any magnitude in the country.

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen, these and other achievements would have not been made possible without the firm commitment and the leadership of the Government of Namibia and the support of our valuable partners, in particular the World Health Organization.

Finally, I wish to reiterate that hospitals are a haven for the public during conflicts, disease outbreaks and other emergencies due to their neutrality, impartiality and ability to protect a community's social and health capital. We must be mindful of the fact that disasters are also politically important and their handling affects public confidence. Therefore, I call upon those entrusted with the construction of hospitals and other health facilities on behalf of the SWAPO Party Government to expedite completion of health facilities and addressing durability to stand the test of time.

Please join the Ministry of Health and Social Services and the entire world in celebrating World Health Day 2009, and let's commit ourselves to do even more for the betterment of the health of our people. *"Save lives. Make hospitals safe in emergencies"*.

Thank **Y**ou.