



Republic of Namibia

Speech by

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

**At the Official Opening of the Family Planning and
Unsafe Abortion Awareness Day**

**Polytechnic of Namibia,
Windhoek,
10 September 2008**

Director of Ceremonies

Hon. Member of Parliament - Lucia Basson

The Rector: Polytechnic of Namibia – Dr T. Tjivikua

UNFPA Country Representative - Mr. Fabian Byomhang

Inspector General of the Namibia Police – S. Ndeitunga

Distinguished Permanent Secretaries

NAPPA Country Director - Mr. Sam Ntelamo

Director of the Namibia Legal Assistance Centre –

Mr. Norman Tjombe

Director of the National Society for Human Rights –

Mr. Phil ya Nangoloh

NANASO National Coordinator - Mr Michael Mulondo

NAPPA Senior Volunteers

Government Civil Servants

Members of the Media

Distinguished invited guests

Ladies and gentlemen

It is a unique opportunity to participate in this programme and to share my views on family planning and unsafe abortion in Namibia. This awareness campaign provides a platform for health practitioners, interested and affected parties to learn from each other about the latest trends and developments in the field of reproductive health.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

Reproductive health, Reproductive rights and Sexual rights are important factors of quality of life, human as well as national development. Reproductive health is a concept that includes women and men's health. It embraces all the critical phases of life from conception, birth, childhood, adolescence, adulthood to old age.

In Namibia, reproductive health services have been focusing more on safe motherhood and family planning, targeting adults and in a way neglecting the sexual and reproductive health needs of young people. This oversight could have contributed to poor utilization of health facilities by young people and increasing number of reproductive health problems among young people such as STI/HIV infections and unwanted pregnancies.

The question is, did the Ministry of Health and Social Services do something about improving access of reproductive health services to young people? Yes, indeed the Ministry started an "adolescent friendly health services" pilot program in six (6) districts in 2002. The districts have now increased to twelve (12).

What are "adolescent friendly health services?" These are services rendered to young people in a friendly and conducive environment with the aim of enhancing their total well being. Services are provided by staff who have undergone special training and understanding the needs and problems of adolescents. The services among

others include: counselling, prevention and treatment of STI and other related infections, family planning advice and issuing of contraceptives (free of charge) as well as provision of relevant health information. Despite some challenges experienced by my Ministry to provide these services, they are there and are free of charge. You can get information, contraceptives in the form of condoms, tablets or injection. The choice is yours and I repeat it is free of charge.

I would like to allude to one issue I mentioned earlier in my remarks, and that is about reproductive health, reproductive rights and sexual rights. I would like to re-emphasize what I said, “reproductive health includes men and women” and I am appealing to the young men in this audience to take this message to heart and get involved. Get involved and make use of available services to avoid early and unwanted pregnancies.

I understand this day is dedicated to family planning and unsafe abortion. I focused my opening remarks on reproductive health because it is the key to avoiding early and unwanted pregnancies, avoiding unsafe abortion and most importantly eliminating the dumping of babies in our river beds. The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo, Egypt in 1994, recognized that young people, especially adolescents are excluded in most national programs and yet they experience many problems. The conference recommended the provision of reproductive health in an integrated manner. The same sentiments were

highlighted by three other international conferences, namely:

- **T**he World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China in 1995;
- **T**he World Conference on Women's 5 year review by the United Nations General Assembly Special Session, New York in 2000; and
- **T**he Fourth African Women Ministers' and Parliamentarians Conference held in Windhoek, Namibia in 2000.

The mere fact that the issue of reproductive health of young people took centre stage at international level is testimony to the challenges facing many countries on this issue. We have a young population in our country of which close to 40 % is under the age of 15 years. Like in many other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, adolescents become sexually active at a very young age, and are prone to Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), and early pregnancies.

A report on a study of hospital-based abortions in this country, conducted between November 1995 and 1998 revealed a high figure of 7, 147 women who were treated for abortion related problems during the three year period in state hospitals. This is quite a high figure, and I am convinced that this trend has not reversed.

Director of Ceremonies,

It is of essence to note that every year, some 14 million adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 give birth in Sub-Saharan Africa. The youth bear twice as many children, and are two to five times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications than women in their twenties. Their babies are also less likely to survive. In every region of the world, rural girls have children earlier than urban girls, similarly studies conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa, points that abortions performed before the age of 20 are more likely self-induced or performed by an untrained person in unsafe circumstances than those aged above 20.

Contraceptive use, although higher among urban youth than their rural counterparts, remains infrequent. Continued high levels of unplanned pregnancy and unsafe abortion indicate a considerable unmet need for family planning among young urban women and men.

I would like to appreciate the biological and emotional changes related to sexuality that takes place during adolescence. Parents and teachers need to guide and nurture the young people to ensure that they develop healthy attitudes and behaviours. Therefore, we ought to recognise the need to support young people and provide them with knowledge and information to protect themselves from the adverse sexual and reproductive outcomes.

I am happy to learn that NAPPA has extended its work to the Polytechnic students and it is my sincere hope that this relationship will culminate into empowering you (all the students) so that you are able to free yourselves from sexual violence; to protect yourselves from unwanted, non-consensual sex; and to have access to information and services on HIV infection and unplanned pregnancy. Staying healthy and delaying family formation is key for adolescent girls and boys to live out of poverty.

In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to extend a humble request to all our developmental partners to support NAPPA in its quest to address the problem of unsafe abortions.

To the students, remember that education is the only key to a successful future. Your primary goal should be to get your education first, and everything else should be secondary.

Lastly, I would like to commend UNFPA for their support and indeed NAPPA for taking up the challenge to steer this initiative.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is now my privilege to declare the NAPPA/Polytechnic Family Planning and Unsafe Abortion Awareness Day officially opened.

I thank you.