



Republic of Namibia

## Keynote Address

By

*Dr Nchabi Richard Kamwi, MP*

*Minister of Health and Social Services*

**Official Opening of the 1<sup>st</sup> Nurses  
Conference**

**Windhoek, 25<sup>th</sup> February 2009**

Programme Director - Mr. K. Kahuure,

The Hon. Minister of Home Affairs and Immigration, Cde. Rosalia Nghidinwa,

The Hon. Deputy Minister - Cde. P. Haingura,

The Deputy Permanent Secretary - Dr Norbert Forster,

The Registrar of the Medical Profession, Mr. Weyulu,

Snr. Superintendents, Medical Officers,

The Nurse Managers,

Chief Control Registered Nurses,

Reverend Sr. Namuhuya,

Directors and Deputy Directors,

Distinguished Delegates, Invited Guests,

Members of the Print and Electronic Media,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed an honour for me to address you today on the occasion of the first ever Nurses Conference in Namibia. This marks one of the most significant days in the history of the nursing profession in the country.

The theme of this conference is *"Nurses striving towards excellence in health care delivery in Namibia"*. Patients/clients are increasingly demanding value for their money; therefore, your theme is appropriate for this conference. In this regard, health professionals are called upon to deliver quality health services.

**Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Allow me to pay tribute to the Namibian nurses, especially for those serving in the remote areas, working under very trying conditions, and yet stood the test of time.

Last week Friday, I paid a visit to Opuwo district hospital where I was impressed to witness the professional nurses who were at hand treating Cholera patients at a newly constructed Cholera Treatment Centre. These senior nurses came from Windhoek Central and Katutura Hospitals with some colleagues from Ohangwena who gave reinforcement to stretched colleagues in Opuwo Hospital.

I value the contributions you are making in improving the health of our nation.

Whilst I acknowledge some of these sterling professionals, there remains a fraction of those with negative attitudes. Few as they may, in the eyes of the general public, they are nurses. As a result they tarnish the good image of this most admired nursing profession. Therefore, time has come for each one of you to be accountable for his/her own conduct and/or absence from duty without leave.

It was for this reason, that the Nursing Council of Namibia was established as a regulatory body, primarily to safeguard the interests of the general public, through setting standards of the nursing profession. Amongst others, it demands a high standard of professional behavior from you as its members. Please take note that in terms of the Namibian Constitution the general public expects from you as civil servants to deliver 100% quality nursing care.

**Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The year 2009 no doubt will be most demanding and hectic in our quest to find concrete solutions to the multitude of public health challenges we are faced with and our commitment to the promotion of health for all Namibians. Furthermore, 2009 is a year in which we will go to the polls for Presidential and National Assembly elections. Clearly, this is the time the nursing profession will be put on a spot light. Whilst, it is your democratic right to cast your ballot paper for a choice of your leaders, I wish to plead with you: "please refrain yourselves from active politics while on duty."!

For this reason, provision of public health remains one of the top priorities of the **SWAPO Party Government** as evidenced by the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest budget allocation to the Ministry of Health and Social Services. Therefore, whatever we do, we are expected to

ensure that we give effect to the **SWAPO Party Election Manifesto 2004**, which directs amongst others for, *“the achievement of 100% immunization coverage, provide more and better preventative and curative facilities and educate the citizens to live healthy lives”*.

We should thus be mindful of the fact that the **SWAPO Party Election Manifesto** is the driving force behind Government agenda on health, as reflected by the overarching health goals of **Vision 2030** and also relates to that of the **Millennium Development Goals** which broadly speaking, relates to the provision of excellent and affordable health care for all Namibians.

This in essence is a call for all of us to do our best in this regard and execute our duties with increased efficiency, professionalism and sound work ethics.

**Dear Delegates,**

The Ministry of Health and Social Services completed a Health and Social Services Systems Review last year. The main findings will be shared with you during the course of the week. This survey has made very clear the views of our service users in relation to the present state of health services in the country. It also sets out main recommendations for the improvement of service delivery in its totality.

I wish to assure you that I shall work very hard together with the Management Team to fully implement these recommendations. High on the agenda will be the following:

- improve human resource management
- strengthening facility management
- reliable availability of equipment and medicines and
- provision of reasonable accommodation to relevant health professionals

I am also pleased that you have included a topic on leadership in your programme. I agree that there is a need for nurse leaders to be pro-active, visionaries and being able to take the bull by the horns.

**Dear Delegates,**

Quoting from the Ministry’s Strategic Plan, the Vision we have set for ourselves is that of becoming *“The leading public provider of integrated, affordable, accessible quality health and social services in Africa responsive to the needs of the Namibian population”*.

This is very commendable indeed and if pursued with dedication and commitment, it will make Namibia a leading country as far as the provision of public health services is concerned”.

Undoubtedly, the achievement of this ambitious Vision calls for paradigm shift from business as usual to business unusual. It calls for amongst others strong and bold leadership, which understand the context in which it operates, enabling it to stretch limited resources in order to achieve optimal results. As the great statesman **Madiba** wisely noted, *“the mark of great leaders is the ability to understand the context in which they are operating and act accordingly”*. I believe I am addressing the nursing managers and those of you, who are in charge of the wards.

I mentioned earlier, 2009 has come with its own challenges and opportunities. We have made some significant achievements in some areas of service delivery. Indeed, with assistance from our development partners, we carried out a training for health workers in areas such as leadership and training courses addressing maternal and child health. In this regard, I wish to highlight the issue of the maternal mortality and HIV/AIDS.

Following the training mentioned above, and the medical equipment supplied in most of our health facilities I wish to ask the following questions from the delegates:

- why are the numbers of maternal deaths still high/increasing when the majority of women have reasonable access to health care?
- where are we getting it wrong?
- is this a reflection of lack of necessary skills on the part of our health professionals?
- is it a reflection of lack of essential tools to facilitate care by our health care professionals?
- or is it simply an attitudinal problem and lack of support for the health care professionals?

**Dear Delegates,**

I am informed that one of the topics to be deliberated on relates to the impact of HIV/AIDS and TB on the nursing profession. As nurses, I do not need to remind you the impact of HIV/AIDS in Namibia. In fact, you are usually the first contact with an HIV/AIDS person and quite often the last witness when a person breathes once last.

In this respect, I am reminded of a quote by the greatest statesman, Mandela, “silence fuels the epidemic”. I am happy to note that you decided to break the wall of silence. Indeed, you chose an attitude described by Winston Churchill “never, never give up”.

**Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I would have failed in my duty, if I would not express our gratitude to the Development Partners and the NGO’s for the financial and technical support accorded to the Ministry, especially in the areas of Maternal and Child Health and HIV/AIDS.

Finally, I wish to thank the delegates attending this very important conference, as well as those you left to stand in for you holding the fort.

Programme Director, Sr. Muballe, Mr. Maswahu, Dear Delegates, I now have the honour to declare the 1<sup>st</sup> Nurses conference officially opened and wish you success in your deliberations.

Thank You.