



**Republic of Namibia**

**OPENING REMARKS**

**BY**

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MINISTER OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

**DURING THE**

**1<sup>ST</sup> NAMIBIAN MALE CONFERENCE ON HIV & AIDS**

**WINDHOEK  
20 FEBRUARY 2008**

**Your Excellency, President of the Republic of Namibia,  
Comrade Hifikepunye Pohamba  
Right Honourable Prime Minister, Comrade Nahas Angula  
Honourable Founding Prime Minister, Dr. Hage Geingob  
Honourable Ministers and Members of Parliament  
Permanent Secretaries  
Honourable Governors  
Representatives of the Diplomatic Corps  
Representatives of United Nations Family Agencies  
Captains of Industry  
Representatives of Non-Governmental and Community Based  
Organisations  
Members of Civil Society  
Dear Colleagues  
Representatives of the Media  
Ladies and Gentlemen**

It is indeed a great honour for me to welcome you to this historic National Male Conference on HIV and AIDS. Your Excellency, I wish to extend to you a warm welcome, and wish to express my gratitude to you for once again demonstrating your continued commitment to the fight against HIV/AIDS, by being with us on this important occasion. Welcome. To our visiting Technical Expert, Mr. Dumisani Rebombo and all the participants: I convey my sincerest greetings to you. You are all most welcome.

**Comrade President, my Seniors, Dear Colleagues**

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 men to consult on how we will increase and improve the quality of male 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 Head of State, Your Excellency President Hifikepunye Pohamba. Furthermore, we will be guided through consultations and presentation by experts both in health and male involvements in HIV/AIDS combating initiatives, followed by group work in which we will have the opportunity to openly engage with one another. We are here as men to learn, share, and openly consult on best ways in which we can and must join in the nationwide fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

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.

In 2007 approximately 7,100 Namibians died of AIDS related causes in Namibia.

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

What are the observations?

The observation is that about 65% of our women folk who were tested positive are receiving these care and treatment services. Whereas only about 35% of HIV positive men are partaking in these services. In almost all these services our women folk are not accompanied by their male partners.

We also note with appreciation since the inception of the ART programmes there are now fewer HIV related patients in state wards.

Our women folk have platforms such as ante natal care, attendance of ARV clinics, and VCT where they are being counselled.

**Dear Colleagues, Distinguished Gentlemen,**

Why this national Male Conference on HIV and AIDS?

Our dear womenfolk are proven active participants in the national programmes aimed to combat HIV/AIDS and are therefore major contributors to curbing the devastation of this disease and preventing its further spread. However, HIV/AIDS infects and affects us all, regardless of gender. Indeed, both women and men have particular needs and contributions essential to a comprehensive redress of this disease and its effects.

Therefore, this Conference has convened this impressive congregation of men directly 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. Therefore, when our women folk ask us, "What are the men doing there?" I encourage you to tell them, with confidence, that "We are joining you in the fight against HIV/AIDS!"

We 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 Namibia's responses to HIV/AIDS. You will agree with me then, on the befitting theme for such a promising Conference, being: ***"Namibian Men, HIV and AIDS: Our Time to Act"***.

I thank you.