



Ministry of Health and Social Services

Opening remarks

By the Honorable Minister of Health and Social Services

DR RICHARD NCHABI KAMWI, MP

At the

2008 World AIDS Day

1st December 2008

Otjivarongo

Invite participants to stand for the national and AU Anthems



Observing Protocol

Your Excellency, Comrade Hifikepunye Pohamba, President of the Republic of Namibia;

Honorable Ministers and Members of Parliament;

Honorable Theophilus Eiseb, Governor of Otjozondjupa Region;

His Worship the Mayor of Otjiwarongo Town, Mr Otto Ipinge;

Honorable Regional and Local Counsellors;

Esteemed Traditional and Religious Leaders;

Your Excellencies Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Distinguished Development Partners;

My colleagues from the Ministry of Health and Social Services;

Media practitioners;

Distinguished invited guests;

Comrades and friends;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

To bless our commemoration today and before we continue, I would like to invite Reverend.... to lead us in a prayer.

Thank you Reverend...



Your Excellency, President Hifikepunye Pohamba, President of the Republic of Namibia,

Comrades and friends,

Ladies and Gentlemen;

A word of welcome

I feel privileged to be your Master of Ceremonies today, as we join the rest of the world in commemorating the twentieth World AIDS Day. It is with great pleasure that I take the floor on behalf of the entire team in the Ministry of Health and Social Services and on my own behalf to welcome you to this important gathering, marking our global, national, regional, local

and individual commitment to fight one of the most challenging scourges humanity has ever faced – HIV/AIDS!

Our collective journey to conquer HIV/AIDS

The world is commemorating the 20th World AIDS Day with mixed feelings of hope and concern. Hope because fewer people are being infected with HIV. And hope because, unlike before, we now have a markedly increased access to treatment for AIDS with the result that fewer people are dying from AIDS. And concern because in spite this progress, the epidemic is still growing. Worldwide, for every two people who start taking treatment today, another five become newly infected!

Namibia is also commemorating the day with reasons for hope and concern and I will tell you more about our hopes and concerns later on.

Your presence here today in this great numbers is not only a source of inspiration but also a renewable political resource and a reenergizing support to our collective effort to conquer AIDS. You have kept the promise to fight harder and longer and we as Government, have matched your expectations

with stronger commitment and a more effective and coordinated response. You have looked for examples to follow and we have been your role models. You have asked for a national response and we have put in place a comprehensive HIV/AIDS programme with the scale and scope that our epidemic requires. You have called for speedy action and we have demonstrated an effective sense of urgency. You have pointed to the orphans, vulnerable, widows and widowers, and the mothers and leaders in our society have put in place homes, organizations and networks to assist those in need. We thank you, Namibians from all walks of life for your exemplary resilience and undying commitment.

The complex nature of HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS has proven to be far more complex than the scientific community expected it to be; HIV/AIDS is more challenging than any other disease the humankind memory can remember; HIV/AIDS has ruined our societies beyond our worst projections. HIV/AIDS has a deeper and longer impact than our collective imagination could have dreamt of.

Our response as a nation – the encouraging news

However, as a nation, we have stood up together; we have shown our determination to conquer HIV/AIDS and build a stronger nation. And I am happy to tell you that your efforts, our efforts, the Namibian nation' efforts are starting to bear fruits.

The report to be launched today by His Excellency, President Hifikepunye Pohamba, has been recently finalized. It is the report of the 2008 HIV prevalence survey conducted every two years among pregnant women. The report has revealed some encouraging results. As you know, these surveys are intended to provide an estimation of HIV infection in pregnant women aged 15 to 49 years countrywide. It helps to monitor infection trends overtime among pregnant women, in different geographical areas and age groups and measure progress in achieving the overall target of reducing HIV prevalence. These data also serve to estimate and project national HIV prevalence using internationally agreed models. The 2008 edition is the ninth prevalence survey conducted since independence and for the first time, sites in all the 34 districts in the country were included. So, we have an even more representative and robust data.

What did we find this time round? What is the study revealing to the Namibian nation?

Comrades, Ladies and gentlemen, the results have revealed that we are making progress towards conquering the epidemic. From an overall HIV prevalence rate of 22% in 2002, Namibia stands at 17.8% in 2008. We are even more encouraged by the decrease in the prevalence among young people aged 15 to 24 years. In the 15 to 19 years age group, prevalence has decreased from 11% in 2002 to 5.1% in 2008. In the 20-24 years age group, there is a decrease from 22% in 2002 to 14% in 2008.

Our response as a nation – the not so good news

However, based on these results we cannot celebrate yet, as not only the current prevalence remains extremely high and unacceptable, but we are seeing worrying trends amongst other segments of the population.

In fact, the results are also telling us that among older age groups, specifically among 35 to 44 years, HIV prevalence is increasing. HIV prevalence has increased from 24.1% in 2006 to 26% in 2008 in the 35 to 39

age group and from 16.9% in 2006 to 17.7% in 2008 in the 40 to 44 age group.

Worse still, the 45-49 age group shows an increase from 9.1% in 2006 to 13.8% in 2008.

This scenario gives us serious reasons for concern. We are concerned that while we seem to be making progress on one end, we may be losing ground on another end. There is need for a better understanding of the reasons behind this increase, so that adequate measures can be taken, and appropriate interventions can be targeted to these groups.

We also know from other studies published this year, especially the Namibia Demographic and Health Survey, that although knowledge of AIDS is almost universal in Namibia and almost 80% of the population knows that HIV can be prevented by using condoms and limiting sex to one uninfected partners, only 51% of women aged 15 to 49 years and 66% of men from the same age group did use a condom consistently with the last higher risk partner.

As for knowing their status, 45% of women and 66% of men have never tested for HIV. And testing is least common in the Caprivi region, where the HIV prevalence is worse, standing at 31.7% in 2008.

What should we do? What is the way forward?

Ladies and Gentlemen, we cannot rest, we cannot sit back, we cannot demobilize. AIDS is a national and long term challenge to our development as a nation. It requires a national and long term response from all of us.

Let's remain united and committed;

Let's exert leadership at all levels, and prevent our youth from new infections!

Let's declare zero tolerance for new HIV infections amongst the youth!

Let's say no to intergenerational sex; let's say no to multiple sex partners!

Let's say no to unprotected sex!

Let's stand up, get tested and know our status; it opens the window for a healthier future, helping you to get treated if you are positive and remain negative if you test negative.

Let's commit ourselves to a generation free of HIV/AIDS!

As a Government, we would like to assure you of our unwavering commitment to continue the fight, now more than ever, because the results are telling us that we can conquer AIDS in Namibia.

I thank you for your kind attention.



Now, in my role as Master of Ceremony, I would like to invite the Group,
“My Future My Choice: to entertain us, before we listen to a poem of Hope
by “Joy Centre”.

I thank you.