



DRAFT KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

HON. DR. RICHARD NCHABI KAMWI
MINISTER OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF THE POLYTECHNIC HIV/AIDS POLICY

POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA, WINDHOEK
28 OCTOBER 2008

Programme Director, Ms. Frieda Shimbuli,
The Rector of the Polytechnic, Dr. Tjama Tjivikua,
Mr. Fabian Byomuhangi, UNFPA Country Representative,
The Vice Rector, Finance and Administration: Dr. Gert Günzel,
Members of the Polytechnic Council,
The Management and Staff of the Polytechnic of Namibia,
Distinguished invited guests,
Members of the media,
Dear Students,
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am indeed honoured for the opportunity to address you this morning, on the occasion of the Launch of the HIV/AIDS Policy of the Polytechnic of Namibia. I am particularly delighted that you have kept your promise to invite me to the launching of this important document in the history of the Polytechnic, when I attended the commemoration of the 12th Polytechnic HIV/AIDS Awareness Campaign earlier in May this year. I praise your efforts to take up this critical health issue and to formulate a standing HIV/AIDS policy for the institution, and commend the Rector and his Management for demonstrating bold leadership in addressing HIV/AIDS as a serious health issue, by codifying a plan to halt the spread of this deadly scourge.

I would also like to take a moment to recognise the efforts of our partners. Firstly, I would like to single out UNFPA who sponsored the printing of this policy. As a development partner your contribution is commendable. Secondly, the Legal Assistance Centre whose role cannot be stressed enough in the fighting of the pandemic - your technical assistance to the Polytechnic helped in the progress of the policy-making endeavour.

Distinguished guests

HIV/AIDS is a crisis of enormous spiritual, social, economic and political proportions. Overcoming the pandemic and the stigma attached to it is one of the most serious challenges of our time. It requires courage, commitment and leadership at all levels. Academic leaders bring with them a special kind of trust and respect amongst the youth of our country that can help alter the course of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The scourge of HIV/AIDS cuts across all sections of the society and threatens the entire fabric of the nation. Namibia is faced with the daunting task of prevention, care and treatment of HIV/AIDS infected and affected persons.

Furthermore, Sub-Saharan Africa, with the highest incidence of HIV infection, is forced to divert its scarce resources from supporting productive activities into the socio-economic sectors impacted by the pandemic. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is also one of the greatest threats to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and Vision 2030. As a key partner in education and national development, the Polytechnic is accountable for the production of an educated and responsible workforce in order for Namibia to realize its Vision 2030.

Simply put, we cannot reduce poverty and hunger, achieve universal education, reduce child mortality rates, improve maternal health, promote gender equality and empower women to effectively participate in the development of a Global Partnership for Development, unless we fight and defeat this pandemic.

Despite various efforts of the Government to curtail the spread of the pandemic, infection rates have continued to rise. The Ministry of Health and Social Services continues to use every opportunity and to do everything in their power to help control and manage this disease.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Experience in other countries has shown that a problem like HIV/AIDS demands a multi-sectoral, diverse response. The war against HIV/AIDS cannot be won by the medical community alone. This struggle demands a multi-dimensional effort involving all segments of society. An enhanced level of the academic and administrative segment of the Polytechnic in the battle would greatly reinforce prevention, care and treatment activities.

In many places a culture of silence surrounds HIV/AIDS and I believe the Polytechnic is no exception. Often this silence is caused by the association between HIV/AIDS and what some term as “immoral behaviour”, sexual orientation and drug and alcohol abuse. When people with HIV are stigmatized, they often remain silent out of fear. The Polytechnic is uniquely poised to break this silence through its policy, by acknowledging the suffering of and reaching out with compassion to the excluded and rejected. As an institution you have the obligation to end guilt, denial, stigma and discrimination. You can open the way to reconciliation, wider understanding, healing, prevention and care, especially among the youth, but also among your entire staff who may be infected and affected in any way.

I share this information with you not to overwhelm you with the gravity of the epidemic, but one should always be reminded about the facts and be brought back to the drawing board to either alternate or to complement your efforts. Having said this let me attend to the business of why we are gathered here today. The Polytechnic has adopted its own HIV/AIDS policy to complement the efforts of the Government. We are indeed here, today to attend to this momentous occasion of the launching of this very important document.

Programme Director
Dear Staff and Students

This document is intended to inform staff and students of the Polytechnic and all key stakeholders with regards to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Through this document, the Polytechnic commits itself to scaling up the fight against the disease and to shift the national response to a multi-sectoral paradigm. This will provide a more effective framework in the institution for intensifying and coordinating its response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic and for mainstreaming interventions within the wider national development programme.

Given this background, I wish to congratulate the organisers of this very important event. Together, our sole objective should remain the promotion of good health and a sound well-being for all. Indeed, I remain grateful for the efforts of the leadership of the PON, led by its visionary, the Rector, and his able Management, to educate and empower the staff and young people in the national fight against HIV/AIDS.

Programme Director

Despite a common Namibian saying that “**there is no hurry in Africa**” Government has begun in earnest to implement the scaling up process. The direction has been set. The process of implementation of this important document has begun for the Polytechnic. I challenge you all, the Rector, Polytechnic Management, Staff and Students, to find a place and a role for yourself in this process. We must act decisively and stop all prevarications. And the time to act is right now!

It is my privilege to present the “Polytechnic HIV/AIDS Policy” to the Polytechnic community and indeed to the entire Namibian nation, as the official framework of the Polytechnic for increasing the fight against HIV/AIDS.

In closing, I would like to once again reiterate my gratitude to the Rector of the Polytechnic, Dr. Tjama Tjivikua for the kind invitation to this function and would also like to commend the commitment and vision of the Polytechnic Management and Council in this struggle.

Thank you for your kind attention.