



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

Keynote Address

By

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Minister of Health and Social Services*

At the

Launching of the Namibian Film
“Three and a Half Lives of Philip Wetu”

30 June 2009

Windhoek

Programme Director, Ms. Doufi Namalambo

H.E. the Ambassador of United States of America, Ms Gail Dennise Mathieu

H.E. the Ambassador of Germany, Egon Kochanke

The GTZ Programme Manager, Multi-sectoral HIV/AIDS Control Project, Dr. Kathrin Lauckner

The Director, Goethe Centre-NaDS, Christiane Schulte

Ms Salen Engelbrecht, NawaLife Trust

Her Worship the Deputy Mayor & Snr. Mayor of the City of WHK

Ms Oshoshene Hiveluah, Media Logistics Namibia

The Film Director, Mr. Richard Pakleppa

Distinguished invited Guests

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

We are meeting to launch a film “Three and a Half Lives of Philip Wetu” after a successful 2009 HIV/AIDS Implementers meeting, where the experts on the subject reflected on what has been done to treat, care and support those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS and to prevent new infections to occur.

Similarly, Namibia had a rare privilege to host the Champions for an HIV-free generation after the HIV/AIDS Implementers meeting. At these meetings Namibia was congratulated for its exceptional leadership and commitment to the health of its citizens. We were informed about the major strides in the response to HIV/AIDS including the quick roll out and universal coverage of life-saving treatment to people living with the virus, the expansive coverage of the prevention of Mother to Child Transmission programme and in providing the social safety nets necessary for the care of people infected and affected by this scourge.

However, with all this good news, HIV transmission is still spreading country wide. Where did we go wrong? What are the drivers of the epidemic and what else can be done, in order to curb the further spread of the epidemic.

According to SADC reports of 2006, multiple concurrent partnerships have been identified as an important contributor to the high levels of HIV across the Southern African Region. In

Namibia, high levels of concurrent relationships and rapid turnover of partners amongst certain sub-groups of the population have been documented, and are most likely significant contributors to the epidemic.

It is equally true that Namibia practices male circumcision in certain groups, however there is wide variation in circumcision rates by region. The observation is that where circumcision is most common for example Omaheke, Kunene and Otjozondjupa have recorded relatively low prevalence of HIV according to sentinel surveillance. Conversely, some of the regions along the North reporting high HIV prevalence such as, Caprivi, Ohangwena, Oshana, Oshikoto and Omusati have relatively low levels of circumcision.

Other contributory factors include alcohol abuse, as it contributes to the spread of HIV/AIDS by increasing sexual risk behaviours. Throughout Namibia, several surveys have consistently found positive correlations between the frequency of alcohol consumptions and having multiple concurrent partners.

Similarly, inter-generational sex is another contributory factor in the further spread of HIV infection. For example, according to the National Demographic Health Survey 2006, it revealed that inter-generational sex in Namibia is associated with high levels of STIs and having multiple partners. These partners introduce the virus into the younger generation where it quickly spreads as a result of rapid partner turnover and common concurrent partnerships.

Clearly, if we are to make an impact to turn-around the strategy is to consider the prevention strategies.

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Against this background, I commend the efforts of some of our partners in this case, GTZ, NaDS, NawaLife Trust, the American Cultural Centre, IBIS, Positive Vibes and Media Logistics for this noble initiative to produce this film as a contributory factor

to turn-around the HIV/AIDS strategy for the better. Congratulations! We remain indebted to the Governments of the US and Germany for the maximum support in our desire to eliminate HIV virus.

The main film we are about to witness, is about “Multiple Concurrent Partnerships” which is one of the major drivers of the HIV epidemic as I stated earlier. The major strategy that we learned from the two meetings concluded in Windhoek, and indeed from this film is the promotion of prevention and prevention and prevention strategy. Prevention of HIV must be priority number one. A strategy that focuses on comprehensive prevention targets the underling codes of the epidemic and has the greatest potential to reduce the scope of the problem.

Therefore, the recently drafted Policy on Male Circumcision deserves support from all stakeholders including Government, private sector and civil society.

One would even go further to encourage the church as the custodian of moral behaviour change to continue with this noble course.

There is also a need for family members in particular the parents to create a conducive environment for discussions, dialogue and strengthening of skills which would greatly enhance the childrens understanding of the risks and the ability to advert these risks.

In this regard, a tool such as this film that we are about to witness will provide an ample opportunity to move in this direction. This would also be one of the tools that can be utilized effectively in schools, in churches and at community level.

I am glad to note that this film re-inforces the issue of relationships and communication. As we all know, relationships were the main focus of the previous strategy that of “Take Control Campaign”. Some of the lessons is that the film is a logical next

step and blends in very well with the messaging that is already out there and the upcoming Multiple concurrent partnerships campaign of Take Control.

The message in this film is in one way or the other similar to the ongoing situations at family level. In other words, the film does not tell people what to do, but rather triggers self-reflection and exploration.

As you view this film, you will learn that the main character, Philip Wetu is a person who is relatively well-off. As a result, his job gets him around the places of his choice and he shares a beautiful home with his long-term partner Genevieve.

In this regard, we are invited to consider that AIDS is not necessarily a disease of the poor, but cuts across the status of humanity. I am glad that this tool fits well in the Government's prevention strategy and trust that it will go a long way in meeting the expectation of the upcoming Medium Term Plan IV.

On behalf of Government, the people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS and indeed myself, wish to congratulate the Film Director and his Team for this successful project.

Programme Director, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I now have the honour and distinct pleasure to declare this film entitled “Three and a Half Lives” officially launched.

I thank you!