

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY PRESIDENT
HIFIKEPUNYE POHAMBAMBA, ON THE OCCASION OF THE
ANNUAL COMMEMORATION OF THE WORLD AIDS DAY**

1ST DECEMBER 2008

**OTJIWARONGO,
OTJOZONDJUPA REGION**

Director of Ceremonies

Honourable Ministers and Members of Parliament

Honourable Theofellus Eiseb Governor of Otjozondjupa Region

His Worship the Mayor of Otjiwarongo

Honourable Regional and Local Councillors

Esteemed Traditional and Religious Leaders

Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Media Practitioners

Distinguished Invited Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am honoured to join you today for this memorable occasion of commemorating the Annual World AIDS Day here in the beautiful town of Otjiwarongo.

World AIDS Day is commemorated to raise awareness about one of the biggest developmental challenges facing humanity today, namely the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Thus, we join hands today with the rest of the world in remembrance of those who passed on and those who are infected with HIV/AIDS.

The theme for this year's celebration is 'Leadership for Prevention'. Leadership must be demonstrated at every level to get ahead of the epidemic; international, national and regional level, and within communities and families. Leadership does not only contain the power and authority to make a difference but especially to lead through action and by good example. Therefore, committed leadership is key in reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS.

HIV/AIDS remains Namibia's greatest development and health challenge. I therefore wish to appeal to all of us to show leadership in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Politicians, religious, traditional, business leaders, teachers, parents, and individuals are called upon not only to join, but to lead our fight against HIV/AIDS. Let us turn our homes, churches, our work places, our places of sports, recreation centres and our wider communities into battle ground in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

During February this year, I officially launched the 1st ever National Male HIV/AIDS Leaders Conference which focused on Namibian Men and

HIV/AIDS. I emphasized that we cannot afford to leave the fight against HIV to any one sector of our society alone.

I also challenged each of the male leaders in attendance to include at least one sentence on fighting the HIV/AIDS pandemic for each statement they make. I reiterate that challenge again here today.

Similarly, in May this year, my dear wife, the First Lady of Namibia, chaired the First National Conference for Women on HIV/AIDS in Windhoek.

During these conferences many of the political, business, church and civic leaders in our society pledged to take leadership role in the fight against HIV/AIDS so that together we will turn the tide in Namibia.

In addition, on the 9th May, many of our prominent leaders honoured their pledge of leadership by serving as role models and publically participated in Namibia's first National HIV Testing Day. Yes, very many together with their partners had the HIV test done on that day for his or her health. Everybody must accept responsibility for their own behaviour.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our leaders are showing the way. Let us all follow their example. Every Namibian must take on leadership roles for prevention in their own lives. In their relationships, their families, and their communities. We need each and every Namibian to fight against this disease.

Director of Ceremonies,

It has been 25 years since we first learned of HIV/AIDS and yet we are still seeing many newly infected people. Our models estimate that there are about 40 new HIV infections a day in our country.

Namibia has made major advances in the scaling up of treatment for HIV. Namibia is known for its treatment coverage leading on the African continent. We are proud of this accomplishment. However, we need to do more on the prevention in order to bring down the infection rate.

Our HIV prevention efforts must now catch up with our impressive roll out of HIV treatment services.

The government, civil society organisation and our development partners have worked tirelessly to provide every Namibian with various services. Our schools have introduced very effective life skills programmes that are showing strong impact. Free male and female condoms can now be obtained countrywide from health facilities and government institutions. We have made great strides in offering Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) services at all hospitals and health facilities in every region. Expectant mothers living with HIV can access the Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT) service that protects our new borne babies from infection.

Also recent health surveys show that general knowledge of the epidemic is high among our fellow countrymen and women. However, at the same time far too many Namibians continue to engage in risky sexual behaviour endangering themselves, their partners, families and communities. Thus, it is essential that we increase our efforts in preventing the spread of the disease that is ravishing our nation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Current research indicates that young people between the ages of 15 and 24 are the most threatened by the disease. However, we remain optimistic as we observed the recent HIV prevalence ratio among the youth. I commend their efforts especially in behavioural change. I must admit that we remain concerned that the HIV prevalence rate remains too high in the age group 25 to 45 years. This is the most productive age bracket.

I would therefore like to urge all Namibians and in particular the middle-aged to take their personal health seriously. We must be fully in control of our own health. Every one of us needs to take personal responsibility for their actions, their behaviour and the result thereof. Protecting oneself from HIV should not be difficult.

In this regard, I would like to take this opportunity to commend all those brave Namibians who have decided to be tested in order to determine their HIV status. Knowing your status puts you in a much better position to make informed choices and to protect yourselves and your loved ones. I call on all our people to get tested to know their HIV status.

I wish to encourage our young people to abstain from sex and delay sexual activity until they are mature and wise enough to make smart decisions regarding sexual relationships. To those young people who are sexually active please use condoms. Given my generation upbringing, this is a message I am at pains to give you. However, there are times for one to face realities and secure lives. Let us remain faithful to our partners.

Director of Ceremonies,

For Namibia to reach Vision 2030 HIV prevention must be one of our nation's top priorities. I therefore would urge young people to take the theme of "ZERO TOLERANCE OF NEW HIV INFECTIONS AMONG THE YOUTH" SERIOUSLY. We must also intensify our prevention efforts for our most productive age groups. Let us ensure that we have HIV/AIDS workplace programmes in every workplace in Namibia! Let us also ensure that we put in place effective HIV/AIDS prevention programmes for all our vulnerable groups and for fellow citizens, who are most at risk.

I would also like to take this opportunity to commend all civil society organisations, faith based organisations, development partners, stakeholders

in the private sector and government institutions for their continuous work and engagement in countering the spread of the AIDS epidemic.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

The prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Namibia as reported by the 2008 National HIV Estimates has shown a decline in adult HIV prevalence from 19.9 % in 2006 down to 17.8 %. While welcoming this decline, the country acknowledges that this prevalence remains unacceptably high.

In conclusion, I would like to extend appreciation to all our dedicated HIV/AIDS workers, our development partners, and to Honourable Theofellus Eiseb and the people of Otjozondjupa Region for hosting this important occasion.

Director of Ceremonies,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

I now have the honour to declare the 2008 National HIV Sentinel Survey Report officially launched.

Thank you.