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Welcome Speech by the Hon. Minister of Health and Social Services, Dr. **Richard Nchabi Kamwi** at the Opening of the First Namibia Male Conference on HIV and AIDS, at the Safari Hotel and Courts on 20 February 2008.

Director of Ceremony
Your Excellency, President Pohamba
Honorable Ministers, Deputy Ministers
Honorable Members of Parliament
Permanent Secretaries of various Ministries
Representatives of the Diplomatic Corps
Representatives of United Nations Family agencies
Representatives of various Development Partners
Captains of Business and Industry
Invited Guests of Non-Governmental and Community Based Organizations
Senior Officials of the Ministry of Health and Social Services
Media representatives
Ladies and Gentlement

Namibia Men and HIV and AIDS: Our Time to Act. This is the theme for today's event that has brought Namibian men from all walks of life to this great meeting. To me, today represents another significant milestone in our fight against HIV/AIDS. Our coming together as men to increase the momentum of the efforts to stop the epidemic is significant in many ways.

Firstly, the need for us to come together to join in the fight is long over due. Secondly, it is a fight that we must win as a nation because the tragedy of HIV and AIDS is that while we know the necessary solutions and what to do, we have been unable to apply them efficiently and effectively. In the third place, when we come together in a joint effort, we stand the best chance of being victorious.

Your Excellency, The President of Our Great Country, Hon. Parliamentarians,

It is on this note that I wish to welcome you all to this great meeting. I wish to specially welcome Your Excellency, The President of the Republic of Namibia, Comrade Hifikepunye Pohamba who without any hesitation gracefully agreed to participate at this meeting. Your Excellency will be remembered for this.

I wish to extend my hearty welcome to my cabinet colleagues, our Hon Parliamentarians and our Governors from the regions who have found time to participate fully in this meeting despite their busy schedule. I consider your participation a measure of the degree of importance you attach to the fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Namibia.

I also want to say a big welcome to all members of the Diplomatic Corps here present this morning. Your participation in this huge numbers as we all can see is not a surprise to me as they have always been our colleagues in arm against HIV and AIDS.

To Permanent Secretaries and heads of Government Agencies, as well as state owned Enterprises, I welcome you. You all have been leading the fight in your various sectors. But for our collective efforts, we would not have been able to get as far as we are.

Your Excellency, Distinguished guests,

Please permit me to draw your attention to all the representatives of the private sector that are here present this morning. They remain one great band of foot soldiers whose efforts have added to the sustenance of the struggle in Namibia.

There is no doubt that we have held and attended meetings on HIV and AIDS in their various forms and numbers. The question that readily comes to mind is that this may be another meeting too many. However, today's meeting is one with a difference when compared to all the others. This is the first time that we are coming together as leaders in the fight against a disease that has taken its toll on our people and the people. This meeting is aimed at promoting initiatives that respond to the needs of men as key players in the prevention of HIV transmission in Namibia.

Your Excellency, Distinguished Participants

I am excited by the excellent highest level of participation in this meeting. It is a testimony to our joint commitment to win the fight against HIV/AIDS in Namibia. I am looking forward to your suggestions and am confident that our deliberations today will add important impetus to our joint endeavors. Later during this year, my ministry will spearhead the compilation of Namibia's 4th Medium Term Plan on HIV/AIDS, which will cover the period 2009 to 2014.

Your contribution today will directly flow into that important exercise. But above all, I trust this conference will be an opportunity to learn, to share and to renew our joint commitment.

Thank you all for coming and please all of you, feel most welcome.

I thank you.