

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



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

1ST DECEMBER 2008

**OTJIWARONGO,
OTJOZONDJUPA REGION**

**Check Against Delivery*

**Director of Ceremonies
Honourable Ministers
Honourable Members of Parliament
Honourable Theofellus Eiseb, Governor of
Otjozondjupa Region
Your Worship, the Mayor of Otjiwarongo
Honourable Regional and Local Authority
Councillors
Esteemed Traditional and Religious Leaders
Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic
Corps
Members of the Media
Distinguished Invited Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am honoured to join you today on this occasion commemorating the Annual World AIDS Day.

December 1st 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 to recommit ourselves individually and collectively to combat this scourge.

This occasion is also important because today the 2008 National HIV Sentinel Survey Report which was commissioned by the Ministry of Health and Social Services, will be released. This report is an important tool in our fight against HIV/AIDS. Firstly, it provides us with vital information on the progress that we are making as a country in combating HIV/AIDS. Secondly, it illustrates the impact of our policy interventions and mitigation mechanisms aimed at supporting those infected and affected by the pandemic.

Director of Ceremonies,

Namibia has made notable advances in expanding the provision of anti-retroviral treatment. In fact, we are now in the leading position in Africa in terms of treatment coverage on the continent. The presentation by Honourable Dr Richard Kamwi, Minister of Health and Social Services, has highlighted the major findings of the 2008 Survey.

As a Government we welcome the decline in the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate in the country, which has dropped from 19.9 percent in 2006 down to 17.8 percent this year. We are encouraged by this accomplishment and will strive to do more.

While welcoming this good news, we are fully aware that the prevalence remains unacceptably high in all age groups.

The HIV prevention efforts must be strengthened to complement the ongoing roll out of HIV treatment services to more communities. It is my hope that each and every clinic in Namibia will be equipped to be able to offer HIV treatment services for those who need them.

I am pleased that our schools have introduced life skills programmes that are showing noticeable impact in raising awareness about HIV/AIDS among our youth. In the same vein, the distribution of free male and female condoms is continuing countrywide. 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 now access treatment for the Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission (PMTCT) that protects new born babies from HIV infection.

It is encouraging that awareness and general knowledge about the epidemic is increasing among the public. However, far too many Namibians continue to engage in risky sexual behaviour endangering themselves, their partners, families and their communities. In this light, it is essential that we increase efforts to prevent the further spread of the disease.

Director of Ceremonies,

Young people between the ages of 15 and 24 are the most threatened age group in Namibia. The indicated recent decrease in HIV prevalence ratio among the youth is encouraging, however, they must be motivated to adopt safer lifestyles as we strive for an HIV free generation.

I am equally concerned that the HIV prevalence rate remains high in the age group from 25 to 45 years. This is the most productive age group of citizens who can serve as the catalyst for social and economic development of Namibia. Everything must be done to safeguard their health. Programmes to promote HIV/AIDS awareness must be introduced at every workplace in Namibia as a matter of urgency.

This is necessary to safeguard the health of our workers and to ensure that productivity levels are maintained at sustainable levels. We must endeavour to promote a healthy workforce in all sectors of our economy

I would like to reiterate that each person must take personal responsibility for their actions and their behaviour. Maintaining good health must be a priority for all of us.

I 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 yourself and your loved ones. I call on all our people to get tested in order to know their HIV status.

I implore our young people to abstain from sex and delay sexual activity until they are mature and wise enough to make informed decisions regarding sexual relationships.

Director of Ceremonies,

The theme for this year's commemoration is *'Leadership for Prevention'*. In many ways, leadership is essential and must be demonstrated at all levels in order to respond effectively to the challenges posed by the epidemic, especially in our part of the world. We must work together to stay two steps ahead of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

In this regard, it is important to demonstrate effective leadership at international, regional and national levels, as well as within our communities and families.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic remains one of the greatest development and health challenges facing our country. I, therefore, wish to appeal to all our people to join hands and participate actively in initiatives both at national and community levels which are aimed at preventing new HIV infections, caring for those who are ill, assisting the orphans and vulnerable children, raising awareness about the dangers of HIV/AIDS and encouraging our youth to behave responsibly at all times.

Moreover, our people, especially the adults should lead by example to make our homes and our communities safer from the threat of HIV/AIDS.

In this regard, politicians, religious, traditional and business leaders, teachers, parents and individuals are all called upon not only to join but to lead the fight against HIV/AIDS. Let us turn our homes, our churches, our work places, our sports fields, our recreation centres and our wider communities into battlegrounds in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

In February this year, I officially opened the first ever National Male HIV/AIDS Leaders Conference which addressed the subject of Namibian Men and HIV/AIDS. On that occasion, I emphasized that we cannot afford to leave the fight against HIV to a single section of our society. Rather, it must be a collective endeavour, because it is only in unity that we can overcome this unprecedented challenge.

I also challenged Namibian men, especially the leaders in various fields, to include at least one sentence on fighting the HIV/AIDS pandemic in each public statement that they make. I reiterate that challenge here today.

I would also like to mention that in May this year, my dear wife, Mrs Pohamba, chaired the First National Conference for Women on HIV/AIDS in Windhoek.

She continues to address audiences of young and old on the need for abstinence and remaining faithful to one partner as one of the most effective ways to control the spread of the disease.

In addition, on 9th May, many of our prominent leaders from different settings as well as many private citizens honoured their pledge of leadership by serving as role models and publicly participated in Namibia's first National HIV Testing Day.

On all these occasions, political, business, church and civic leaders in our society pledged to take a leadership role in the fight against HIV/AIDS so that together we can turn the tide in Namibia.

I wish to commend all those Namibians who have taken the lead in the fight against HIV/AIDS. They have given a worthy example. Every Namibian must do their part to protect his or her health and life as well as those of their fellow human beings. We need each and every Namibian to fight against this disease.

Director of Ceremonies,

For Namibia to achieve the goals and objectives of Vision 2030, HIV prevention must be one of our nation's top priorities. Therefore, I urge young people to take to heart the theme for this year's commemoration which is *“ZERO TOLERANCE OF NEW HIV INFECTIONS AMONG THE YOUTH”*.

I would like to recognise the good work being done by civil society organisations, faith-based organisations, our development co-operation partners, the private sector and government institutions in countering the spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

I would also like to express my appreciation to all our dedicated HIV/AIDS workers, our development co-operation partners, and to Honourable Governor Theofellus Eiseb and the people of Otjozondjupa Region for hosting this important occasion.

I now have the distinct honour to launch the 2008 World AIDS Day commemorations and to declare the 2008 National HIV Sentinel Survey Report officially released.

I thank you.