

ADDRESS BY DEPUTY PRESIDENT HIS EXCELLENCY DAVID MABUZA AT THE  
WORLD AIDS DAY COMMEMORATION, JAMES MOTLATSI STADIUM,  
KLERKSDORP, NORTH WEST PROVINCE  
01 December 2019

Programme Directors,

Our Host and Premier of North West Province, Professor Job Mokgoro, Minister of Health, Dr Zwelini Mkhize, Ministers and Deputy Ministers present, Deputy Chair of SANAC, Ms Steve Letsike, The Executive Director of the United Nations Joint Programme on AIDS, Ms Winnie Byanyima, MECs and Mayors present, Members of the SANAC Board of Trustees, The Chairperson of Provincial House of Traditional Leaders, Kgosi Mabe, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Once again we meet on this 31st Commemoration of World Aids Day not only to remember those whose lives were lost to HIV and AIDS, but to celebrate the positive strides we have collectively made in our fight to end AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.

We have chosen to commemorate this year's World AIDS day here in Matlosana in acknowledgement of prevailing challenges of HIV infections in this area as well as efforts by current leadership to revive the North West Provincial AIDS Council.

We are confident that working together across all sectors of society, the people of this province will join the other parts of the country in taking the fight to defeat AIDS epidemic and TB.

We are particularly pleased that this year, we are joined by the new Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS, Ms Winnie Byanyima.

She is an activist of note, and a distinguished advocate for human rights and development. We have no doubt that her vast experience in political leadership and human development, will take us forward in the struggle to end the AIDS epidemic.

Fellow Compatriots,

For our part as a country, our journey and contribution to the vision of zero new infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths, has been long and difficult.

There was a time when every week and in every community, the pain of losing someone to AIDS-related illnesses was a common phenomenon.

We are today acknowledged by UNAIDS and others as a global and continental leader in HIV response. This is precisely because we have adopted and implemented the right and comprehensive policies to respond to this epidemic.

We could not achieve this without partnerships and support from our global partners. That is why, we must appreciate the contribution of the global campaign under by UNAIDS that galvanised all of us in political leadership, civil society and private sector into coherent action.

We are also grateful for the unwavering and continued support from our partners, in particular the United Nations family, the United States Government through its PEPFAR programme and the Global Fund. We wish to thank you for your continued support and emphasise that your support is not in vain.

As the South African National AIDS Council, we have seen the impact our collaborative efforts has had in moving the response forward.

The dynamic leadership of all sectors represented on the South African National AIDS Council is testament of our commitment to place the interest of our communities at centre-stage.

We take pride in the fact that in South Africa, government remains the main funder of the country's comprehensive response by contributing close to 80% of the resources.

Today, we count among our victories the fact that South Africa has the biggest HIV treatment programme in the world, with more than 4.5 million people on life-saving antiretrovirals.

Our anti-retroviral treatment programme has resulted to an increase in life expectancy of our people and low levels of mother-to-child HIV transmission rates.

This means that millions of South Africans who previously had no hope of sustained quality of life, now live longer and are able to contribute in building a South Africa of our dreams.

Fellow compatriots

The World AIDS Day is commemorated each year on the 1st of December and is an opportunity for every community to unite in the fight against HIV, show support for people living with HIV and remember those who lost their lives to this epidemic.

Placing people living with and affected by HIV at the centre of our efforts to defeat this epidemic, has proven to be a correct course of action. This is consistent with the theme for this year, which is "Communities Make the Difference".

This theme resonates with our with our history of struggle. At the height of apartheid and repression, our communities mobilised themselves into various community action groups to build solidarity, cohesion and unity of purpose.

Our communities drew a line in the sand and demanded a just society based on human dignity, non-racialism, non-sexism, and democratic governance.

Our youth, civil society organisations, progressive media all stood firm with determination against apartheid brutality, resulting to its ultimate collapse.

Likewise, as the impact of the epidemic brought pain and misery to many families in our townships and villages, our communities once more, mobilised themselves into pressure groups and advocacy organisations and demanded government action and provision of treatment for those infected by HIV.

Community action, remains an important pillar in making change happen, and in shaping policy agenda and outcomes. If any of us doubted the power of community action in making a difference, look no further than the community of EShowe in KwaZulu-Natal.

This mostly remote and rural community of EShowe was able to achieve what no other community in South Africa or in the African continent has achieved so far in our fight against the epidemic.

In EShowe, 90% of people who are infected with HIV were diagnosed, 94% of people who were diagnosed are on antiretroviral treatment, and 95% of those who receive antiretroviral treatment are virally suppressed, which greatly decreases the chances of transmission.

This means that EShowe exceeded the 90-90-90 target set in 2014 by the United Nations programme for HIV and AIDS. We once again congratulate the community of EShowe for this achievement, and we are certain that it will be replicated in other communities as we intensify the fight against the disease.

In the same vein, we are pleased that most of our districts have reached the first 90 of the United Nations' 90-90-90 target.

We are also pleased that the first-ever national TB prevalence survey results, will be released soon and will provide us with a more accurate data on how we are performing in addressing TB in our communities.

Indeed, we are making positive progress in reducing the rate of new infections from an estimated 270,000 in 2016 to 222,000 in 2018.

We have made major progress on voluntary male medical circumcision as an area of prevention, where close to 4-million men were circumcised as at the end of March 2019. This is a significant achievement as these men were not only circumcised, but also underwent HIV prevention programmes including testing services.

Whilst we make these welcome strides, we must intensify our programme on prevention by employing every method possible to end this epidemic. We must tackle head-on all contributing factors to new infections. This include talking openly and frankly to our young people on issues of sexuality and resultant risks of unprotected sex to potential infections and teenage pregnancies.

This fight should be led from the front.

Therefore, political leadership and commitment is required from our premiers and mayors to ensure that AIDS Councils are fully functional. We will be relying on our communities to take up the task of holding these structures accountable.

Fellow compatriots

The call to action on the this 2019 World AIDS Day, is about recognising the power of community action, even in the face of other numerous social challenges like unemployment, poverty and inequality.

We should not despair. We must be inspired to find innovative solutions to ending these challenges, including ending AIDS epidemic in our lifetime.

The community action we are calling for, should be about creating platforms for collaborative approaches in how we advance human rights for all.

It should be communities making a difference in ending stigma and discrimination against key populations and those infected by HIV and TB.

For us to win end the dual pandemics of HIV and TB, communities must stop stigmatising and discriminating against those affected and infected by these pandemics.

Our call for community action to make a difference, is about mobilising our societies to change social attitudes and norms, some of whom are a product of our socialisation.

These are social attitudes that are at the heart of the ills we are experiencing today, which breed and perpetuate gender based violence that is being visited upon women, girl-children, the elderly and other key populations.

This does not represent the values of ubuntu and human rights that we stand for, and have committed to in our Bill of Rights.

Therefore, we must bring to an end any form of violence and discrimination against women and girls, including denial of right to protection, access to treatment and care, as well as right to reproductive health.

We must leave no one behind - for human rights must be enjoyed by all irrespective of gender and sexual orientation. Just as we fight to end AIDS epidemic, so we should with equal determination fight to end the culture of gender-based violence.

It is a bad mark to our democracy and freedoms. Anything contrary, undermines our fight to end the AIDS epidemic.

As Government, we will work tirelessly to ensure the speedy implementation of the National Emergency Response Plan to combat gender-based violence and femicide.

In this regard, we take this opportunity to commend the Men Championing Change programmes, led by the SANAC Men's sector, through the Takuwani Riime programme.

This programme is spearheading one of the most robust men mobilisation initiatives in the country to address social ills perpetuated by patriarchy.

Every day should be about community mobilisation in all corners of our country to ensure that gender-based violence has no place in our society.

Fellow South Africans,

We wish to remind you that we launched the Checka Impilo National Wellness campaign last year to ensure that together we drive a concerted programme that would reach the following targets by December 2020:

Screen and test 14-million people for HIV, TB, Sexually Transmitted Infections and non-communicable diseases, Find and treat at least 7-million people who have diabetes, hypertension and common cancers, Initiate additional 2-million HIV positive people on antiretroviral treatment; and Find and treat at least 80,000 of the 160,000 estimated missing TB patients.

These targets will not be achievable without your willing participation. A healthier and better South Africa begins with you and me. The time to stop losing many lives prematurely and unnecessarily because of not taking appropriate action early enough is now. Let the future generations hail our work as community and health workers in bringing down the curtain on all preventable and treatable diseases.

We need ambassadors for change of behavior. At the South African TB Conference in Durban last year, we made an undertaking to donate a bus to the University of Zululand Choir to be our HIV and TB Ambassadors.

On behalf of Government and the South African National AIDS Council, I have the pleasure to hand over this bus to these ambassadors of HIV and TB, the University of Zululand Choir!

Finally, as we prepare for the festive season, we wish to remind all of us to take care of ourselves and act responsibly in everything we do. On this World AIDS Day, let us remember all those who have lost the battle against HIV and AIDS.

We must also not tire from reminding ourselves that defeating HIV and AIDS is possible in our lifetime and that it is our collective responsibility. We wish you all a memorable and productive World AIDS Day 2019.

I thank you.