

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE EXECUTIVE MAYOR OF MATJHABENG LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, ME MATHABO MOKAPO ON THE OCCASION OF THE LAUNCH OF THE MATJHABENG LOCAL AIDS COUNCIL ON MONDAY 4 DECEMBER 2006, ODENDAALSRUS

Programme Director
MEC for Education – Ms Ouma Tsopo
Members of the Mayoral Committee
Members of the Department of Health
Members of the Department of Education
Members of the SA Police Service
Members of the Department of Justice
Members of CBO's and NGO's
Councillors
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am humbled by the fact that I am to address you, on this important occasion of the launch of the Matjhabeng Local AIDS Council. This launch is symbolic to the important work that as the Matjhabeng community we hope to engage in as we fight the scourge that afflicts many in our communities.

Three days ago, the whole world celebrated World Aids Day, a day that was mooted by the United Nations in 1988.

During the last two decades, the HIV pandemic has entered our consciousness as an incomprehensible disaster. HIV and AIDS has already taken a terrible human toll, laying claim to millions of lives, inflicting pain and grief, causing fear and uncertainty and threatening economic devastation.

The epidemic has significantly reduced the life expectancy, as many people in the 15-49 year age group are dying of AIDS. The impact of the epidemic on the economy is gradually being felt in many countries. Global statistics on the epidemic provide sufficient evidence to make HIV/AIDS both a regional and national priority.

It is common knowledge that our country has one of the most severe HIV/AIDS epidemics in the world. And it is for this reason that all of us need to attach great importance to this scourge that may ultimately decimate our population.

The underlying causes of this epidemic include socio economic factors such as poverty, migrant labour, commercial sex workers, the low status of women, illiteracy, stigma and discrimination. Attached to these causes are immediate determinants of the epidemic that include behavioural factors such as unprotected sexual intercourse and multiple sexual partners and biological factors such as the high prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases.

According to latest statistics, more than 5 million South Africans or 11% of the population are already infected with a disease for which there is still no cure. This situation is worsened by the fact that there is little sign of the infection rate slowing.

As government we have the responsibility to lead and guide in the fight against this epidemic because we are the custodian of the health and well-being of the people of this country. In this light, government has developed a range of policies dating from 1995 to try and enhance the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Amongst these strategies is the Strategic Plan for South Africa 2000-2005, which is currently under review.

Five priority areas, as identified in the HIV and AIDS/STD Strategic Plan for South Africa 2000-2005 underpin the response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. These areas are:

- Prevention

This entails promoting safe and healthy sexual behaviour, improving the management and control of STD's, reducing mother to child transmission and addressing issues relating to blood transfusion and HIV.

- Treatment, Care and Support

The intention is to provide treatment, care and support services in health facilities, provide adequate treatment, care and support services in communities, and develop and expand the provision of care to children and orphans.

- Human Rights and Legal Issues

This involves the creation of an appropriate social environment and develop an appropriate legal and policy environment.

- Research, Surveillance, monitoring and evaluation

The aim is to ensure AIDS vaccine development, investigate treatment and care options, conduct policy research and conduct regular surveillance.

- Information, education and social mobilization

This is underpinned and supported by a communication strategy, using print media, radio,TV, leaflets, billboards and mobile media. The AIDS toll free helpline provides an important tool for providing advice, education and support to people.

The general objective of this strategic plan is to reduce the number of new HIV infections and also reduce the impact of HIV/AIDS on families and communities. Also the Strategic Plan provides a broad framework for government, NGO's, business, labour, women and all sectors of society.

The Department of Health together with its partners came up with a Comprehensive Plan for Management, Care and Treatment of HIV/AIDS. Anti retroviral therapy has been added to a series of interventions that now constitute the Comprehensive Plan.

As a country we face a challenge, wherein it is impossible for our public hospitals to care for hundreds of thousands of people dying from AIDS related illnesses.

This dictates that we follow the option of community based care because emotional support from both family and community is helpful. Already our government has voiced its support for community care programs, and its efforts are being complemented by the private sector, non governmental organizations, community based organizations and faith based organizations.

As a result of the progress made in reducing the prizes of drugs, the increase in the social budget and the improvement in the capacity of the health system, SA has now build a strong foundation on which to build an effective HIV response, with increasing political commitment and partner co-ordination at all levels.

Our government has faced severe attacks on its efforts to ensure that the global response to HIV/AIDS takes into consideration the peculiar challenges facing the African continent. For instance, in our country and Africa as a whole HIV and AIDS are affecting the general population , health and social systems are weak and resources are limited to meet the needs of our populations.

Our populations face many challenges including unemployment, illiteracy and lack of access to basic services. As a result, even before HIV infection the health of our populations is already compromised by poor nutritional status and a lack of basic health services.

As government we fully acknowledge that there is no cure for HIV/AIDS, but believe that nutrition is critical in prolonging progression from HIV infection to development of AIDS defining conditions. Also nutrition is critical in enhancing the effectiveness of medical treatment.

Because of our understanding of the peculiarities in our continent, as government we are trying to highlight the need for research and development of traditional medicine because the majority of our populations use this medicine.

The HIV/AIDS Communication Survey for 2006, released 3 weeks back, indicates that various HIV communication campaigns, including that of government-Khomanani are having a significant impact in modifying sexual behaviour.

Loveliflife – South Africa's national HIV Prevention Program for Youth, which was launched in 1999, has made tremendous impact in the fight against HIV/AIDS in our country.

Because we acknowledge the seriousness of the implication of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, government committed itself to providing resources and leadership to implement a HIV/AIDS programme in the workplace. This programme aims to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS/STD, ensure better understanding in the workplace and prohibit any unfair discrimination on the basis of your HIV status.

As government we have introduced Mother to Child Transmission procedures that require expanded voluntary counseling and HIV testing for women, strengthening prenatal, delivery and postnatal care programmes.

Provision has been made for the highest body that advises government on all matters relating to HIV/AIDS, which is the South African National AIDS Council. This council among others advises government on HIV/AIDS/STD policy, advocates for the effective involvement of sectors and organizations in implementing programmes and strategies, monitors the implementation of the strategic plan and strengthens partnerships for an expanded national response among all sectors.

Provision has been made for the replication of the SANAC at provincial and local level. Hence today we are launching the Matjhabeng AIDS Council, whose mandate among others will be:

- To ensure that HIV/AIDS activities within Matjhabeng are focused.
- Coordinate the implementation of strategies to minimize the spread of HIV/AIDS.
- Coordinate the utilization of resources and identify deficiencies.
- Coordinate communication on HIV/AIDS
- Implement resolutions of the Provincial/district AIDS Council
- Provide feedback to the Provincial AIDS Council through the District AIDS Council on HIV/AIDS issues at the local level.

I hope the establishment of this council will serve to enhance our multi-sectoral response as the Matjhabeng community to the epidemic. Also, we must ensure that we develop a programme of action that will guide us to action as we undertake this important work to fight the scourge.

Conclusion

I wish to appeal to all stakeholders, within Matjhabeng Municipality, to work together to stop the spread of HIV infection and reduce the impact of AIDS. Conscious of the fact that there is no cure for HIV/AIDS we must continue to preach that prevention is the mainstay of our response to HIV/AIDS.

Lastly, let us remember that, acting with urgency, resolve and consistency we can overcome.

Thank you

**COUNCILLOR MATHABO MOKAPO
EXECUTIVE MAYOR**