

## **Media Statement : MEC disturbed by news that two infants were ditched in the bushes by teenage mothers over Easter**

TO: ALL MEDIA

DATE: 29 APRIL 2011

EMBARGO: NONE

Today, MEC Sibongiseni Dhlomo led a 1 kilometre walk of about 200 people carrying placards that read; 'NO WOMAN SHOULD DIE GIVING LIFE', others read; 'SPEAK OUT AGAINST ILLEGAL AND UNSAFE ABORTION CENTRES', 'HEY SUGAR DADDY I'M ONLY A CHILD NOT A SEX OBJECT', 'MOTHERS DAY IS EVERYDAY', etc.

During the official opening of the extended Ulundi A clinic, which provides 24 hours services especially for pregnant women; the MEC warned that the fight against high maternal and infant mortality rates is far from over for as long as pregnancies are unwanted and unplanned.

The extensions to the clinic included the building of a mother's lodge where pregnant women in labour will be able to be near a professional midwife for when they are in labour and during delivery.

"I have been disturbed by the news that just last week, during Easter, two young girls who were pregnant abandoned their infants in the bushes because their pregnancy was unplanned and unwanted," said MEC Dhlomo at the clinic opening. "Since January 2011 the clinic has attended to 104 teenagers who came to deliver."

With the high rates of maternal and infant mortality (237/100 000 live births and 47/1000 live births respectively) in the country and province, said the MEC, we are definitely not going to meet the Millennium Development Goal 4 and 5 which are to reduce child mortality rate by two thirds and reduce maternal mortality by three quarters. The MEC told the leaders who had gathered at the clinic that pregnancies happen in the community and it will take the community working with government to change the current picture.

The Premier, Dr Zweli Mkhize, also came to the clinic opening as it was during his tenure as MEC for Health that the clinic was rebuilt. He affirmed the assertions by the MEC and went on to express his concern on the "shocking teenage pregnancy statistics" in the province.

The Premier said; "We are a province with great leadership and it is in times like these when leaders have to come to the front and take bold steps to curb the situation. Each year, it is estimated, no less than 17000 school children get pregnant while at school. We cannot forget that this is also telling us that the rate of new HIV infections is not decreasing."

MEC Dhlomo also spoke critically to parents and traditional leaders who condone the raping of young girls by people old enough to be their parents.

He said; "We have learnt with concern that when a child has had sex with an older man, and when parents open a case of statutory rape it is common practice that the man will pay inkomo yomqhoyiso (a cleansing cow) to the family and the case is dropped. This is perpetuating rape and flies in the face of our efforts to protect the young ones from acquiring the HIV infections or unwanted pregnancies."

ENDS

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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH: KWAZULU-NATAL  
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