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Prince Nhlanguiso Zulu skips honeymoon to take KZN DoH success story to America

HEALTH ambassador prince Nhlanguiso Zulu is relishing the opportunity to tell the world all about the massive gains that the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health is making to curb the spread of diseases such as TB, HIV and AIDS, as well as the success of the province's Medical Male Circumcision programme.

The former professional Amazulu Football Club player, who is now a TB Ambassador under the Department's Strategic Health Programmes (incorporating HIV and AIDS, Sexually Transmitted Infections and Tuberculosis), jets out to the US today (06 May 2016), as part of the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) of the U.S. Department of State.

The three week trip, described as the US government's premier professional exchange programme, will take prince Zulu to Washington DC, Kansas City, New Orleans, Washington and Salt Lake City. He will be sharing knowledge with health officials and dignitaries from 22 countries.

Objectives of the project include promoting international co-operation on the common challenges facing the global community in preventing, treating, and managing communicable and non-communicable diseases.

It will also focus on assessing public awareness campaigns about health issues impacted by economic downturns, poverty, and other external challenges that affect health care delivery systems.

A keen advocate of health, prince Zulu, 43, regularly champions the Department's various health initiatives, such as Medical Male Circumcision programme, which has seen more than 600 000 men – including hostel dwellers - get circumcised; Dual Protection (combining condoms and female contraceptives for females, medical male circumcision for males during every sexual episode) and how the spread of Tuberculosis can be prevented.

He speaks openly about his own battle with TB, which resulted in the removal of one of his lungs a few years ago.

Even though he should still be on honeymoon, having got married just last weekend, he says the trip to the US was an opportunity he couldn't miss to tell the world about the good work of the KZN Department of Health.

“The honeymoon can wait. I'm committed to what I do. Just like my father, I want to take care of the people, and help build a better society. I'm looking forward to the trip, and meeting leaders from other countries, to tell them about how well we have done and learning from them so that we can improve.

“I want to come back with valuable information and share it here with ordinary people, as

well as those who are in authority, in terms of what needs to be done to curb the spread of HIV, TB and Teenage Pregnancy.

“TB is still the main killer disease out of all of them. I’m trying to get people who will help the government... People who can team up with the royal family and work with us. We can’t have a big nation like this succumb to the ravages of TB when we are here as young leaders,” he says.

In 2009, Washington, D.C., officials announced that the district's HIV rate, hovering around 3 percent of the population. But six years later, thanks to a host of new policies at the federal, local, and non-profit level, there had been a nearly 60 percent decrease in new diagnoses.

“I want to share with the Americans and people from other countries how we get to places like hostels which aren’t easily accessible and circumcise people. I want to tell them how we have circumcised more than 600 000 men and boys in just a few years.

“I know that Washington, D.C., had a crisis with HIV, which they were able to deal with. I want to learn from them how can we get rid of, or control HIV, better. Our government is trying by all means, but the problem is with communities. We need to accelerate our TB screening campaign. I want to get information in terms of what we can do better. We are doing our level best, but how can we make communities respond to our messages, and how to fight stigma and discrimination, so that the fight against TB can be won.”

Prince Zulu’s health philosophy is rooted in altruism. “I nearly died because of TB. My mission is to help others and ensure that they don’t go through what I went through.”

He singles out the discrimination of people who have diseases as “the biggest enemy we have. I want to fight it. I want to spread the message of love, so that people band together to fight disease. Our children are the future. Let us not destroy our future,” he says.

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