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KZN Department of Health launches anti-skin bleaching campaign

KWAZULU-Natal Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo has called upon the people of the province to reject all colonial notions of beauty which have resulted in the widespread usage of dangerous skin lightening and bleaching products. Such products cause skin cancer and even premature death, MEC Dhlomo warns.

“Over decades we have seen people blemished and disfigured especially amongst the African and

Indian groups due to the use of skin lighteners. Wrong notions were being promoted to the effect that to be Black, especially if you were particularly dark, was loaded with negative stereotypes. The implication was that natural physical traits of blackness were defective; whiteness was now the norm for Blacks to emulate.

“Several products, promising miraculous transformations, were then manufactured and marketed specifically to the Black community. Consequently many Black women and Black men have mutilated their bodies and have even died because they used products, containing harsh chemicals that promised peace of mind in a bottle,” he said, in speech read on his behalf.

This was at a march which culminated in the official launch of the Anti-Skin Lightening and Bleaching campaign in Durban yesterday (26 August 2016).

Scores of people braved today’s rainy weather to attend the march, which also featured testimonials and strong warnings from people who had borne the brunt of these products.

MEC Dhlomo also made an impassioned plea to law enforcement authorities to act swiftly to ensure that these illegal products are taken off the shelves, destroyed and not imported again.

“We also call upon all upon them to play their roles in enforcing legislation and monitoring of illegal importation of banned skin creams.

“The Business Sector Associations also has to show its caring and progressive ethos calling upon all their members to remove of all the banned skin lightening creams from their shelves in supermarkets, vendors, pharmacies and spice shops.

To the manufacturers, we demand that they stick to the strict guidelines and legislation that



governs the sale of products which are meant for treating pigmentation.

He said it was high time the South African populace get to know that these products often contain harmful chemicals that come by themselves or in combination of steroid, hydroquinone, mercury, phenol and its derivatives and or resorcinol.

He said some of the adverse effects borne by these skin lightening and bleaching products were:



- Skin cancer
- Making yourself susceptibility to skin infections
- Skin thinning
- Uneven skin tone with increased pigmentation
- Stretch marks
- Increased in appearance and thickness of skin vessels
- Increase in hair growth at sites of application
- Ochronosis (irreversible greyish pigmentation)
- Kidney and neurological problems (mercury).

MEC Dhlomo said the rampant use of skin lightening and bleaching products reminded him of Malcom X, one of the leading figures in the American Civil Movements, who once posed to his fellow country men and women, the following questions:

‘Who taught you to hate the texture of your hair?

Who taught you to hate the colour of your skin? To such extent you bleach, to get to look like the white man.

Who taught you to hate the shape of your nose and the shape of your lips? Who taught you to

*hate yourself from the top of your head to the soles of your feet?
Who taught you to hate your own kind? Who taught you to hate the race that you belong to so
much so that you don't want to be around each other?'*

MEC Dhlomo said: "Again, we reaffirm confidence and pride in oneself and declare that skin bleaching represents a profound, yet subliminal hatred of one's self. It is time indigenous Africans and Indians embrace natural beauty and love the skin they are in."

MEC Dhlomo thanked all stakeholders who had partnered with the Department on this campaign, including the Department of Dermatology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal; the Cosmetics Toiletries and Fragrances Association (CTFA); the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA); the Dermatology Society of South Africa (DSSA); the Women's Dermatological Society of SA (WDS) as well as the Students Representative Council (SRC).

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