

Speech by MEC Neliswa Nkonyeni on the Candlelighting ceremony during the Provincial General Council meeting in Durban

15 July 06

Fellow compatriots, what I have been called upon to do in terms of this Candle lighting Ceremony, has four [4] main objectives:

- To honour the memory of those lost to AIDS
- To show support for those living with HIV and AIDS
- To raise community awareness and decrease stigma related to HIV/AIDS, and
- To mobilize community involvement in the fight against HIV/AIDS

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

This year's theme, "**Lighting the path to a brighter future**" focuses on bringing about emotional relief to families and friends of those who have passed away due to AIDS.

It also aims to spread hope and encouragement to prevent new HIV infections and to motivate people living with HIV and AIDS to live positively.

The Department of Health needs to be assisted in its efforts to prevent new infections. In accordance with the **Comprehensive HIV and AIDS Care, Management and Treatment Plan** this is what we are doing:

- Roll out of VCT to all health institutions as well as 50 non-medical sites
- Roll out of PMTCT to all institutions with maternal services
- Strengthening HIV-infection prevention initiatives by increasing awareness and condom distribution
- Providing nutritional supplement to all HIV positive people under our care
- Treating sexually transmitted diseases in all our institutions—free to those who cannot pay.
- Providing drugs to all victims of sexual violence
- Put systems in place for the prevention of needle-stick injuries to all our employees.
- Working to provide adequate step down facilities in all districts
- Last year alone recruited and trained 5000 Community Health Workers.
- Operating 3 functioning Truck-Stop wellness centres.
- Rollout the provision of ARV treatment to all accredited institutions, 55 hospitals and 5 Community Health centres.
- In collaboration with the Nelson Mandela School of Medicine, training and working together with Traditional Healers to curb the spread of HIV. It's a fact; people do make use of African Traditional Medicine.

Our biggest challenge at the moment is that we do not know how many people are infected, as **people do not want to test.**

As political leaders we need to show leadership in fighting to **reduce stigma and discrimination.**

Let us provide direction in this regard since we know in most cases this stigma is accompanied by ignorance, resentment as well as bottled anger. Often people living with HIV and AIDS are treated with indignity. Their human rights are violated as a result they are scared to be open about their status. Consequently this prevents them from seeking help they need and that in itself makes very difficult to control the further spread of HIV.

Comrades, we also need to pay more attention on educating our girl children since we know that in our country there still exist socio-economic factors that place women at risk, for instance that:

- Poverty forces many women into sex-work in order to survive
- Some men are reluctant to visit clinics when they have sexually transmitted infections.
- Many women cannot choose to abstain, use a condom or insist on other forms of safer sex.
- Fear of violence prevents women from disclosing their HIV status.
- Rape contributes greatly to the spread of HIV

- Many older men have sex with younger girls in exchange for favours, gifts or money. [o sugar daddy]

In our individual capacities there is more we can offer in the line of appropriate emotional and practical care, support and help within our means. Asisakwazi ukubukelela manje.

Our challenge is to demonstrate loving and caring attitudes towards:

- the neighbour who is infected;
- the families of the affected;
- those who are dying and confused and lonely;
- the orphans left to fend for themselves because the parents died as a result of HIV and AIDS.

We, the people, can and must prevent infections.