

Speech by KZN Health MEC, Neliswa Nkonyeni on the occasion of a Gala Dinner cementing Partnership between Government and Business on the fight against HIV and AIDS

15 November 07

We sincerely appreciate all your efforts in coming here to make inputs as well as commitments of intellectual and material resources that will assist in the quest to rid our land the scourge of HIV and AIDS.

The time has come for all of us to recognize that HIV and AIDS is not someone else's problem. It is my problem. It is your problem.

We need to recognize that by allowing this disease to spread, we face the danger that half of our youth will not reach adulthood, judging by the numbers of young people we continue burying every weekend.

We need to know that the economy will eventually shrink and that there will be a large number of sick people whom the healthy will not be able to maintain, the grannies are already having it tough, raising children when they themselves are supposed to be enjoying the sunset beams of their lives.

We must regard ourselves as fortunate that time and resources have been provided for us to again look deep unto what else can be done to salvage this critical situation.

We have been afforded two days to launch the process of establishing District AIDS Councils, organs that will be able to observe and deal with HIV and AIDS effects where people are at.

We are also fortunate that we are again afforded an opportunity to work with business in agreeing on suitable ways and means to partner in the implementation of the HIV and AIDS and STI Strategic Plan for South Africa.

Tonight the business community need to know that their involvement in the fight against the spread the HIV and AIDS is not limited to placing condoms in the toilets and putting up posters in the canteens.

We all need to use this summit to come up with activities and programmes implementable at all levels where people are. Without doubt, we need to find each others role in dealing with and eradicating some of tenets that are hotbeds for the spread of HIV and AIDS, I.E:

- Poverty
- Migrant labour dynamics
- Commercial sex workers
- The low status of women
- Illiteracy
- Stigma and discrimination
- High crime rate
- Rapid urbanization and cultural modernization
- Cross boarder movement and
- High unemployment rate

The concept document for this summit is clear on what it request and expect the business to undertake, that is, supporting specific programmes requested by respective districts intended to mitigate the impact of HIV and AIDS.

Fellow compatriots, since morning you have heard how much impact this dreadful decease has on the communities as pronounced by Ricky Phili of HURST when giving out statistics per all our eleven Districts.

You have also heard from Dr Gugu Ngubane about Government's response to the spread of this dreadful disease as guided by the HIV and AIDS and STI National Strategic Plan, 2007-2011.

Uppermost for us all is to work for the attainment of the Plan's objectives, which says, as a people we need to:

- Decrease the number of new infections by 50% by 2011
- Decrease the number of people dying prematurely from AIDS
- Improve the quality of life of those infected

I am saying the mere fact that we are here as people coming from all the corners of this province, coming from all stratas of society encompassing government, civil society, business and labour movement, clearly shows that this time, as a province, we must win.

I think it is crucial for all of us here to leave this place carrying one message that immediate causes or determinants HIV and AIDS epidemic are:

- Behavioral factors such as unprotected sexual intercourse,
- Multiple sexual partners, as well as
- Biological factors such as high prevalence of sexual transmitted infections

Judging from the objectives of this summit, we are bound to succeed as we plan to now engage in joint planning and joint action against this disease.

The starting point would be for all of us, wherever we are and in whatever we do, to embrace and promote the notion of healthy lifestyle. This entails condom use, healthy eating, hygiene ethos and all other simple small things that we can do for ourselves. Adherence to that ethos, ladies and gentlemen, can constitute a rock foundation for the prevention of preventable diseases and those of lifestyle.

As a country, in April, we celebrated the 57th World Health Day under the theme; **“Invest in health, build a safer future.”** I am bringing this to the fore because today we are with the business community and we are talking partnership.

My appeal to them is to make time and resources available for their workforce to partake in screening services that are crucial in the early detection of diseases and are instrumental in simplifying and strengthening of health education programmes that inform, educate and mobilize the communities around health issues.

You are also asked to pay more attention to issues pertaining to the wellbeing of women especially in the workplace. As a government we have also prioritized the Maternal Child and Women’s Health and as such we already have a number of interventions in place this sphere as evidenced by:

- Free health care for pregnant mothers
- Free health care to the children under 5 years
- Free treatment for sexually transmitted infections
- Free testing and treatment of Tuberculosis, as well as
- Free testing on HIV and AIDS, and free provision of Antiretroviral drugs

We truly believe that putting women and children at the core of the health agenda is the answer to solving the challenge of disease and poverty.

As business, and fellow countrymen, in your outlook, we ask you to adopt the maxim that declares that Investing in women and children secures a healthy nation.

We are imploring all the business people regardless of the size of their operations to open their pockets and bank accounts to sponsor and fund education that is geared towards the improvement of lives and standards of our country’s womenfolk. We are saying there is clear evidence that investing in women’s health and education improves the health status of their children which is a key ingredient for a healthy nation in the future.

As part of the community, business, regardless of size, must also not to turn a blind eye to the Aids orphans that live within our mist.

Let us make it our responsibility to ensure that there is a constant contribution and donation of food, money, cloths and blankets to the NIP sites that cater for these needy children. Big conglomerates in the spirit of Ubuntu and meaningful partnership surely can and are able to provide each municipality with a NIP site and shelter where required.

Remember our objective all the time is the attainment of a better life for all.

As a parting shot, we also believe that this is an important for this conference and for all the business community to highlight the need to intensify interventions against various lung diseases affecting our nation and the world.

We ask you to work with us in enforcing Tobacco Control measures that we have enacted. This alone, we believe may go a long way in the prevention of lung diseases that eventually escalate to Tuberculosis, throat cancer and lung cancer.

We are extremely concerned about the rising rate of TB infections especially in this province. We want the business community to work with us in the total eradication of this curable but deadly disease.

This summit has to acknowledge that there is a close connection between TB and HIV and AIDS in our country and that the new Tuberculosis National Strategic Plan for 2007-2011 provides for interventions to deal with the challenges posed by co-infection. I am mentioning this because there is help at hand and that people have to know that TB can be treated even if a person has been diagnosed as HIV positive.

To be effective, the Plan directs that a package of care for HIV positive patients should include routine screening for TB, treatment for those with TB and TB preventive therapy for those found not to have TB.

We are asking for partnership in this venture as we are saying over the next five years, we want to improve our case detection rate to 70%, cure rate to 85% and treatment success rate to more than 85%.

Once more, from the bottom of my heart, I want to thank you for the time you have committed in finding ways in which we can eventually talk of an AIDS FREE GENERATION.

Let us fight all the diseases with the same vigour and ensure a healthy living as guided by the World Health Organisation (WHO) that defines health as "A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity"