

**Welcome message from the KZN MEC for Health
Ms NP Nkonyeni – AMREF (Monday 16 June 2008)**

It gives me great pleasure and honour to be part of this esteemed International Communications Forum audience and to welcome you to this beautiful province of KwaZulu-Natal and to the City of eThekweni in particular.

I have been told that, as an intrinsic communications wing of AMREF, you have come from around the globe to showcase your work of bringing communities to closer proximity of a health care system that caters for the poorest of the poor. I have also been reliably informed that you will be visiting NGO projects as well Traditional Healers programmes that you have supported since the establishment of your permanent Country Office in the country in 1995.

I would like to acknowledge and applaud the quality of your programmatic output in the four of South Africa's provinces within which you have anchored your projects – namely, the Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga, Limpopo and our own province KwaZulu-Natal. Your specialized focus and strategic intervention in making accessible a comprehensive health care system to vulnerable groups – children under five years of age,

adolescents, women and young mothers as well as people in remote and rural communities – is not going un-noticed by both the National and provincial governments.

The fact that 90% of your staff internationally is African must be applauded and recognized beyond the borders of our province, country and continent. It stands to reason that your programmes and projects are developed and executed by people whose cultural roots and identity lie in the African community and who have thus internalized the African political agenda. We appreciate this deviation from the global norm.

Finally, almost the entirety of your Core Values and Beliefs project favourably at this Conference towards the recognition of June 16 as the day on which to bring back to life and eternal memory the sterling and irrevocable contribution of our young people on this day in 1976. Your first Core Value unapologetically foregrounds *Health as a Human Right!* and this places the rest of your core business within a human rights ambit, approach and methodology. This approach sets you apart!

Also, the fact that your organization is pro-poor, gender equity-conscious, transparent and accountable to indigenous communities, innovative and upholds non-discriminatory and professional ethical standards places you as a Medical and Research enterprise way above research organizations that have pawned our people, especially those in rural communities, as experimental guinea pigs. I would like to say to you: Keep up the good work, and be assured of the political

support from my Department and from the provincial leadership of the African National Congress.

In closing, the Traditional Healers' Project into which you as AMREF have invested so much of your financial, technical and human resource capital is of specific interest to me and my Department. We have developed a special strategic partnership with Traditional Health practitioners both in the country in general and in our province in particular, to the extent of bringing traditional medicine and conventional Western medicine closer to each other to the benefit our people.

We know that all of us are struggling and hemorrhaging from conditions like HIV and AIDS, Tuberculosis with all its complex strains, malaria in the Zululand and Umkhanyakude Districts, and the high infant mortality and morbidity rates across the country. The sharpening of policy from our current legislation on the recognition of Traditional Medicine and Traditional Health Practitioners will place AMREF and the Health Departments in the four provinces mentioned above in a strategic alliance to bring a user-friendly health care system to our people.

Welcome to KwaZulu-Natal! May the work you do so selflessly, flourish and grow as a specific socio-economic dividend to our communities, especially those that are rural, remote and still under-developed. May God and the gods of Africa bless you as you engage in this province and in the rest of South Africa.

I wish you a great, productive and successful Conference.

I THANK YOU!