

Speech by KZN Health MEC on the occasion of a welcome dinner for the Inter-Parliamentary Union Delegation at Sun Coast in Durban

22 January 2009

Chairperson of the KZN Health Portfolio Committee–Mama Zanele Ludidi

Acting Head of the Dept of Health –Dr Yoliswa Mbele

Advisory Committee Secretariat of the IPU–Mr James Jennings

Chair of the Advisory Committee of the IPU–Hon H Bogopane Zulu

Honorable Members of Parliament

Hon Members of the KZN Legislature

Senior Officials from the Dept of Health, Nationally, Provincially and in the District

Honored guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good evening

As a Province, we feel very honored to host a dinner for this very important Inter Parliamentary Union delegation that consist of the high powered people we regard as friends.

We are also very elated that you have chosen this province as an arena to conduct the impact and assessments of our interventions geared towards assisting those already infected and at the same time critically looking deep into our programs

aimed at ensuring that we decrease the number of newly infected cases.

I have to concede that our situation as a Province is a little bit dire as we are the most populous province in the country with more than 10 million inhabitants, the majority of whom reside in rural areas where access to health care is still being improved.

We also have to concede that HIV and AIDS is one of the main challenges facing our country in general and our province in particular.

The statistics show that out of the 10 million strong citizens of this province, approximately 1, 5 million of them are already infected.

This reality, I must point out is taking a big toll on our resources to the detriment of other equally stubborn and persistent ailments that afflict our people. We continue pouring resources in the hope that HIV prevalence will eventually slow down as evidenced by the trends seen in the past five years.

As you can imagine, the provision of Anti-Retroviral Therapy has seen KwaZulu Natal province being the largest ARV Programme in the country and in the world for that matter. Since we started with the roll out in 2004, we can safely say as of December last year a total number of 205 000 patients were enrolled. By the way this is not to say we have given attention to all in need.

Considering the mammoth task that we are still faced with in this regard, it feels like the Executive Officer of the Inter Parliamentary Union, **James Jennings** here, was like talking to our situation when addressing the General Assembly of the United Nations in June last year when he said: *'a huge amount remains to be done if we are to have any chance of meeting the goal of universal access to prevention, treatment, care and support by the year 2010.'*

Ladies and gentlemen, bearing in mind that you have just landed and that tonight's episode is a means to welcome you to this beautiful province, we are as such not going to burden you with all our problems as we leave that for tomorrow morning's session when we will be making presentations that will give you a true picture of what we are grappling with.

What we can tell you is that we are keeping in step with all the key priorities aimed at curbing the spread of this malady as pronounced in the **HIV and AIDS National Strategic Plan of 2007 -2011**.

For now on behalf of our Monarch, King Goodwill Zwelithini; our Hon Premier, Dr Sbusiso Ndebele and all the peace loving people of this Province, we are welcoming you, hoping that your short sojourn to this land will be memorable and that it is not the last.

Believe me when I say, beside the gravity of our HIV and AIDS situation, this beautiful place has a lot to offer for you as

individuals and for your families when you do decide to come as tourists.

I thank you.