

Speech by KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo on the occasion of the Annual General Conference of the African Gospel Church held in Ramsgate, Margate

29 June 2013

Senior Pastor – I M Shezi

Omongameli bezifunda

Abefundisi

Abavangeli

Brothers and Sisters

As we join the whole world in praying for our icon, u Tata Rolihlahla Mandela in this hour of anxiety, wishing the outcome to be what will be commensurate with his sacrifices, I invite all of us to raise our hands and repeat the words of our Lord as pronounced in the Book of **Isaiah 55 verse 11**:

'...so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.' Amen.

To all the Mandela Family; elders; wife; children and grandchildren, we ask them to find solace and strength in the Book of **Philippians 4 verse 6**:

'..Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done. Then you will

experience God's peace, which exceeds anything you will understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus."

Bazalwane abathandekayo, we are also a congregation in mourning as we recall and pray for the spirit of u Baba Langa Agrippa Cebani, who we laid to rest last week. He was a long standing member of the church and a loyal leader of our people under the tutelage of the African National Congress. May his beautiful soul rests in eternal peace.

Bazalwane Abahle; allow me to thank the leadership of this all important church for initiating and fostering close ties with the Government. Your decision to invite us to be part of your deliberation today clearly shows that your ministry is deeply rooted with the masses and that you consider and regard yourselves as a partner in the quest to develop our society. The Provincial Secretary of our glorious movement, Cde Sihle Zikalala is sending his best wishes.

I feel extremely proud yet humbled to stand before you today to share accomplishments of this Government; areas of concern as well as create a platform for partnerships. In this I am boasted by the request of u Baba T Moji here who emphasised that this Church is prepared and ready to work with the Government led by uMsholozzi at national level and by Honourable UKhabazela at Provincial level. Senior Pastor, Baba Shezi, we are ready and available.

When we started as a present day Government; our President, Hon Jacob Zuma, emphasised a motto that says: 'working together, we can achieve more.' We have indeed achieved a lot.

We know that our Province has been regarded as the epicentre of HIV and TB but now working together we are starting to see and experience change. In His 2013 State of the Province Address, our Hon Premier, Dr Zweli Mkhize said: *“For the first time in recent history, HIV and AIDS are showing signs of retreat. The number of AIDS-related deaths is declining. Since we took office in 2009, we have stabilised HIV prevalence in our Province from 39.5% to 37.4%, as a direct result of our integrated approach through the Provincial Council on AIDS working together with all sectors of our society to ensure that our initiatives on prevention and to make anti-retroviral treatment available, are successful...”*

Indeed, recognition for this progress is attributable to all the leaders who are able to utilize their platforms to de-stigmatise HIV; to tell those infected that there is help at hand and to embrace and love those who have lost their loved ones as a result of HIV. The church has played and will continue to have a big role in this sphere.

Allow me to also report that working together; this Province has managed to reduce the mother to child transmission of HIV to very low levels. This reduction is quantified in the report by the Medical Research Council (MRC), which indicated that **the Province has managed to reduce mother to child transmission from 20.9% in 2005 to just 2.2% in July 2012.**

Our target now as we speak is **for reduction in MTCT rate to 1.4% and lower**. This fellow Christians can just remain a wish if you decide to fold hands. We rely on you to ensure that all pregnant mothers visit clinics to receive Ante—natal care which is the only way in which we guarantee that all babies will be born without HIV and that both the mother and the baby will come back alive after delivery to be celebrated at home. Assist us in this regard!

Work with us in ensuring that all babies that get born reach adulthood, healthy and strong by driving all the parents to immunize the children. This is so important and offered freely by the government of the people.

As leaders, we also need to be exemplary and demonstrate to our people the importance of knowing our status. Our people need to know that through **HIV testing and counselling**, those who are test negative will be encouraged to develop means to remain negative. Those found to be positive will get the help offered and begin to live a healthily and positive lives.

We should not shy away from cautioning and warning each other about the dangers of:

- early sexual debut,
- sex with multiple sexual partners,
- unprotected sex
- substance and drug abuse leading to unprotected sex
- being involved with SUGAR DADDIES

Speaking of SUGGAR DADDIES, I would like to share with you results emanating from a study conducted by the **Centre for the AIDS Programme of Research in South Africa (CAPRISA)** which says:

'One of the most striking features of the HIV epidemic in South Africa is the stark differences in age and gender distribution of HIV infection. In South Africa, more than 20% of pregnant women aged 15– 24 years attending prenatal clinics are infected with HIV, and overall, about 76% of HIV infected young people aged 15–24 are women.. HIV prevalence is highest in teenage girls while it is low in teenage boys, with prevalence rates rising in men about 5-7 years later than in women.'

What this says is that girls must be more vigilant as they are more susceptible to incur HIV than boys because of HIV positive older men preying on them.

As we speak today, it is winter holidays for the schools in SA and the KZN Department of Health has organised circumcision camps in the whole Province. Let us encourage our boys do everything to protect themselves by heeding His Majesty's call of **Medical Male Circumcision (MMC)**. Church elders are encouraged to join traditional leaders in these camps to give moral lessons to the initiates so that we can create caring and protective men out of these boys. We need to all go in there to talk them out of Whoonga; women abuse and all the social ills that the vulnerable members in the society get visited with.

We all have to play our part in ridding our land the scourge of HIV and AIDS.

I really implore to work with us in putting right all the wrongs that you see in our societies. I ask you to also pray for us so that in everything we do we be led by the wisdom of God.

Pray for us; pray for our country and be part of the progressive movement committed to changing the lives of our people for the better.

I thank you.