

Minister of Public Works
Ms S Sigcau
1 December 2003

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World Aids Day function

The Director-General, Mr James Maseko
Senior Managers
All members of staff of the Department of Public Works

Government has always believed in cultivating a society that cares. Government has often reiterated its unwavering stance against poverty and all its symptoms. Prevalence of diseases and the inability of certain communities to access health care system is one of the signs of poverty. Other signs of poverty include:

- Lack of education
- Lack of nutrition
- Unemployment
- Insufficient essential services
- Inadequate infrastructure.

Statistics aside, government has always maintained that one death from any preventable causes is one too many. Hence our resolve to prioritise the fight against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, Malaria, Cholera, Malnutrition and Women and Child abuse.

As the hallmark of a caring government, efforts are being galvanised to reduce any deaths resulting from road accidents and taxi violence in the same manner as we succeeded in fighting politically motivated violence.

In 1992, the National Aids Coordination Committee of South Africa was established, consisting of concerned individuals, non-governmental organisations, Aids service organisations, local, provincial and national government, the African National Congress Health Secretariat, as well as representatives of business unions and churches. Its task was to develop a draft National Aids Strategy.

When ANC became government in 1994, the National Aids Draft Strategy was consolidated within a National Aids Plan and formally adopted by government under the responsibility of the Department of Health. An InterMinisterial Committee on HIV/Aids was established in parliament in 1997 and the then Deputy President, Mr Thabo Mbeki launched the Partnership Against Aids on 09 October 1998 to mobilise all South Africans to commit to working together around HIV/Aids.

In February 2000, Government launched the South African National Aids Council (SANAC) as the highest body that advises government on HIV/Aids. Chaired by the Deputy President, Mr Jacob Zuma, SANAC drew representatives from government, business, civil society and the medical sector, including traditional healers.

To successfully fight the battle against HIV/Aids, government looked beyond the disease and its shrouding statistics, but considered the social and economic reality which exacerbate the epidemic, such as:

- High poverty and low education levels, resulting in more risk taking behaviour and commercial sex work
- Low status of women in society and relationships, that make it difficult for them to protect themselves in sexual relationships

Consequently government prioritised poverty eradication, women empowerment, and general improvement of education for the population. The government's 5-year strategic plan for Aids emphasises prevention, treatment, care, support, fighting against stigma and discrimination, and investing in research and disease surveillance. Perhaps without beating our own drum or blowing our trumpet, our achievements in our multisectoral response to Aids are remarkable:

- Between 1999 and 2001 we reduced the prevalence of syphilis from 9% to 3%
- To date we have introduced more than 1600 counselling and voluntary testing sites throughout the country

- In 2001, out of its own concern and initiative, the government introduced the programme for the prevention-of-mother-to-child transmission of HIV
- Established 450 home-based care programmes across the country
- We purchase and distribute condoms free of charge, and are spending R123 million on this programme in the current financial year, and are dispensing 22 million male condoms and 100 000 female condoms every month
- Cabinet has now approved the rollout of antiretroviral drugs and the provincial health departments are busy ensuring that they have the relevant infrastructure.

We cannot remain complacent though. Through the government's HIV/Aids communication campaign of ABC, we shall continue to draw people's attention to the cost-effectiveness of prevention versus treatment. If one can help it, let them rather Abstain from sexual activity until the right moment. For anybody who has started to engage, our appeal to them is to Be Faithful. If everything else fails, or one is in doubt, please Condomise. In the battle against HIV/Aids, prevention is still more noble than cure.

The mobilisation of the civil society will continue unabated. In recognition of this, the National Department of Public Works launched its HIV/Awareness Strategy in the Construction Industry in October 2002 at the construction site of the Nelson Mandela Museum at Qunu near Umtata in Eastern Cape. At my recent meeting with the industry stakeholders at Port Elizabeth, again HIV/Aids was on the agenda.

The challenge is on you, the staff, to embrace HIV/Aids as a challenge and work with government towards the recession of the disease. Aids sufferers, like any patients needs support and care. That is why the challenge is at the door of each and everyone of you. The challenge is in a form of a question addressed directly at you. Sibhambathiso sini ozakusenza ukulwa i Aids. Are you part of any programme that helps fight the pandemic. Are part of any organisation which does not only help with advocacy but with concrete means of helping the affected parties. Do you give space in the fight against Aids.

Freedom and dignity lies in the choices one makes. Global business did not realise the effects of aids in the economy.

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