

SPEECH DELIVERED BY LIMPOPO PREMIER HON. CHUPU STANLEY MATHABATHA ON THE OCCASION OF PROVINCIAL WORLD TB DAY

24TH March 2021

Let me start by greeting all the people of Limpopo in all the five districts. I greet you on behalf of our loving and caring government.

Today, we join the rest of the world to commemorate the World TB Day. This day is not only commemorated in our country, it is commemorated throughout the world.

Every year on the 24th of March the World come together to commemorate the World Tuberculosis (TB) Day. We are doing this in order to raise public awareness about the devastating health, social and economic consequences of TB.

The idea is to move towards ending this global epidemic called TB. This disease was first discovered in 1882 by Dr Robert Koch.

Since then, TB has assumed the status of being the world's deadliest infectious killers.

Like I have said, today, we are joining millions of people across the globe as we put yet another concrete expression to our fight against the scourge of tuberculosis, TB.

This is mainly because, tuberculosis is one of the major communicable diseases causing ill health and death world-wide.

Currently, TB has been in the top 10 causes of death and the leading cause of death from a single infectious agent (ranking above HIV/AIDS) for the past decade.

TB is caused by the bacillus *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*; which is spread when people who are sick with TB expel the bacteria into the air, for example by coughing, sneezing, talking and singing.

TB as is commonly known, infects the lungs by inhalation of contaminated air from an infected individual.

What happened during the early days of the year 2020, emerged first as a myth and later to become a pandemic that will result into devastation of lives and livelihoods.

Coronavirus, has impacted negatively on the lives of both the rich and the poor, blacks and whites, young and old, rich nations and poorer nation the same way.

I refer to Covid-19 pandemic because its detrimental effects nearly caused an uproar, with activists of TB and HIV/AIDS nearly revolting mainly because, they felt funding was being diverted from this equally important diseases to fight coronavirus.

However, today we are deeply elated because, we are seeing signs of progress with the introduction of different covid-19 vaccines. We are hopeful that coupled with all the preventive measures against coronavirus, we will equally reduce TB infections as well.

We are confidently stating the above mainly because, research has shown us that all communicable diseases share similar spreading patterns. That is why we therefore believe that, using all our energies, efforts and resources, our generation can save more lives.

Scientists and researchers alike, tells us that TB is a disease of poverty and economic distress that may lead to vulnerability, marginalization, stigma and discrimination.

That is why it is therefore important to state categorically clear that with the current poverty relieve measures, we are able to control further spread of TB in our country and our province.

We know fully that globally, an estimated 10 million people fell ill with TB in 2019, a number that has been declining very slowly in recent years.

On the same wavelength, we know that an estimated 1.2 million people died because of TB in 2019. Out of that number, 56% who developed TB in 2019 are men aged 15 years plus, while women accounted for 32% and children below the age of 15 years were at 12%.

It is worth noting that among the affected people, 8,2% were people living with HIV.

The above mentioned figures are solely from international front and a reflection of the global picture. Meanwhile, the South African and Limpopo picture is as follows:

Currently, South Africa is rated amongst the top 30 high burdened countries with TB and HIV infections.

Statistics South Africa has over the years reported that TB is the leading cause of death in South Africa, especially amongst people infected with HIV.

According to the Global TB report 360 000 people fell sick with TB in 2019 in South Africa and 58 000 people died as a result.

In Limpopo, TB prevalence increased from 165 per 100 000 in 2018/19 to 197 per 100 000 in 2019/20.

The number of TB cases in Limpopo province declined from 12 709 in 2018 to 11 747 in 2019 and further declined to 8 874 in 2020. This is indeed heartwarming news.

The decline is due to reduced TB screening rate from 95.3% in 2019 to 89.8% in 2020.

In our continued fight against further spread of these communicable diseases, the provincial department of health has developed an integrated screening register for TB/Covid-19 and HIV to be used by all health facilities to find missing TB cases.

Statistics tells us that the number of people who died due to TB in the province was 1764 in 2017 and reduced to 1262 in 2019. As much as we believe in a principle that says One Life in One too many, we are happy to notice decline in the number of casualties.

As much as some people will want to take this for granted, it remains critical that society in made aware of the detrimental effects of diseases such as TB and HIV/AIDS.

Therefore, government is calling upon everybody to look out for signs and symptoms of TB, which are in the main the following:

- ✓ Coughing for more than two weeks;
- ✓ Drenching night sweat;
- ✓ Fever;

- ✓ Loss of weight and
- ✓ Difficulty in breathing.

The people of Limpopo are advised to please visit the nearest health facility for a TB and Covid-19 screening.

If you are found to be having TB you shall be given TB treatment for six months.

Government has made TB treatment free in all health care facilities and TB is curable even when one is HIV positive.

This year's theme for the World TB Day is:

'The Clock is ticking: Let's Find, Treat and End TB Now!'

And we are making a clarion call to everyone to 'Unite to end TB in our Communities'.

This is an earnest call to all South Africans to rally behind provincial efforts to end TB.

There is an urgent need to find, initiate and retain TB clients on treatment.

Government is banking on the support of every single citizen as it aims to promote mutual accountability between leaders and ordinary South Africans.

Every individual in every community has a role to play in eliminating TB.

Globally, efforts are also underway to fight the scourge of TB. Their theme at the international arena is: 'The Clock is ticking to reach the #TBTARGETS2022'.

This means that the world is also running out of time on the commitments made by world leaders to end TB.

The people of Limpopo

Today, as we commemorate World TB Day 2021 we call upon all all leaders and members of political parties, leaders and members of all religious and faith based organizations, law makers, civil society groups and our esteemed Traditional Leaders, to lead the fight to end TB.

This can be successfully achieved when all of us can advocate and encourage TB screening and testing as part of their work in our different fields.

We want to thank our front line workers for continuing with this glorious fight against all odds. We also call upon the healthcare workers to lead the fight to end TB by focusing on finding undiagnosed missing TB patients through integrated screening for TB and COVID-19 in all health facilities.

We know very well that it is not easy for all of us, affected and infected, however, we are saying that it is worth it.

The Clock is ticking: **Let's Find, Treat and End TB Now!**

I Thank You!

Inkomu!

Ndo livhuwa!

Kea Leboga!