

**ADDRESS BY THE MEC OF HEALTH, DR PHOPHI RAMATHUBA ON
THE OCCASION OF THE WORLD AIDS DAY COMMEMORATION,
HELD AT MAHELA FARM, LETSITELE, GREATER TZANEEN LOCAL
MUNICIPALITY.**

01 December 2023

Programme Director;

Executive Mayor and Mayors of Local Municipalities;

All councilors present here;

Members of the Provincial and District AIDS Councils;

Invited guests;

Members of the Media;

Esteemed ladies and Gentlemen:

Avuxeni!

Dumelang!

Ndaa!

Thank you for your positive response to our invitation to commemorate this important day with us.

As you know, the 1st of December has been declared as a World AIDS Day.

World AIDS Day is observed to raise awareness about the HIV/AIDS pandemic globally. The day is meant to encourage governments,

organizations, and individuals to show support towards people living with HIV/AIDS while also promoting strategies to prevent new infections.

World AIDS Day is an opportunity to remember those who have lost their lives to the virus while also empowering others to take action to end HIV/AIDS.

This is a day for global reflection and commemoration.

We reflect deeply on the impact and extent of our campaigns against this phenomenon of HIV/AIDS.

We also pause to commemorate the many lives that we have lost to HIV/AIDS.

We also remember to offer treatment to those who are living with this disease without fail. We also drum up our preventative message.

We are confident to say that HIV/AIDS is no longer a death sentence. It is just a manageable disease. Maybe even better than other deadly diseases.

It is our considered view that we have indeed registered positive strides in our fight against HIV/AIDS.

Together we will win the fight against HIV/AIDS.

We are hopeful that community by community, person by person, we will win the fight against HIV/AIDS.

We should double up and take the fight to another opportunistic disease called TB.

Let us offer the same support to the sufferers of TB. We should spare neither energy nor resource in the battle against TB and HIV/AIDS.

Programme director;

We observe World AIDS Day to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS, to honor and remember those who have lost their lives to the disease, and to support those who are living with HIV/AIDS.

The day is also meant to encourage people to take action to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and to help those who are affected by the disease. By educating people about the risks and how it can be prevented, we hope to reduce the number of new infections and ultimately help end the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

This year we are commemorating this World AIDS DAY, with South Africa's adopted theme that says: "**Let communities lead**".

The theme bounds all of us to collectively wage a battle against this relentless epidemic. We are duty bound as a province to work hand in hand to bring about an HIV/AIDS free generation.

The road ahead towards an AIDS –free generation is still painfully long, we have to keep doing the work and educating communities about the deadly impact of the epidemic.

Programme Director;

Life expectancy has improved from 65,6 to 66,5 years for females and from 59,1 to 61,2 formales.

We have reduced AIDS related deaths by from 8163 people in 2017 to 7738 by end of 2022.

Prevent of Mother to Child Transmission has improved from 0,83% to 0,86% in the past five years. More than 95% of pregnant women who HIV positive are placed on ARVs.

Maternal mortality has significantly improved from 183 deaths per 100 000 people to 85 deaths per 100 000 population.

We have over 410 000 people on our ARV programme. And new HIV infection are constantly declining (from 0.53 % in 2017 to 0.42 percent).

The TB mortality rate has also improved from 11.6% to 8.5%. the department has introduced new HIV and TB regiments that have helped with the programme performance.

Programme Director;

We need to intensify our awareness campaigns. This will help us towards raising the most fundamental awareness about HIV and AIDS. The other

most important factor is to mitigate against the stigma that exists within our communities.

The purpose of candle lighting is to reflect and remember the many lives lost to AIDS. It is an opportunity to honour those who dedicated their lives to helping people living with and affected by HIV and continue to mobilise our communities in solidarity.

The message of “**Cheka Impilo**” resonate with all of us. Our health is our responsibility.

We are convening these year’s commemoration activities under the new normal brought in by the Coronavirus Pandemic, that has swept across the globe, leaving families without a father, mother or both parents. Some children are orphaned as we speak. The trail of destruction left behind by the pandemic is momentous and almost unthinkable.

Our everyday HIV message remains as important as ever that:

Let us remember the ABC message: Abstain, Be Faithful and Condomise to protect yourself and others.

Those who are on ARVs should continue taking their treatment.

We have, as a province, registered over 430 000 people on our antiretroviral programme.

Colleagues;

Limpopo Health is launching the U=U campaign which means Undetectable is equal to untransmissible.

If you have HIV you must take your ARVs every day to reduce the number of HIV viruses (also known as your viral load) in your body.

A very low viral load, in other words, an undetectable virus means you remain healthy and have less chance (not zero chance) of passing the virus to other people like your partner or your child if you are pregnant.

An undetectable virus cannot protect you from sexually transmitted infections or pregnancy, so you have to continue using condoms correctly and consistently.

This will go a long way in preserving lives which would have otherwise be lost to the disease.

Importantly, Limpopo Health is also launching oral PrEP, which is a new, safe way of preventing a person of contracting HIV. It can only be taken by people who do not have HIV, so the nurse/doctor will test you first to check if you have HIV before giving you PrEP.

PrEP is made of two special ARVs which are combined into one pill. The pill has to be taken every day to prevent HIV infection.

PrEP is also safe for pregnant and breastfeeding women to take. It will not harm mom and baby. PrEP will be available from the 1st of December in our clinics for anyone who tested HIV negative and feels that they are at risk of getting HIV.

Programme Director;

As we are also observing the United Nations 16 Days of Activism for No violence against women and children, we also remember the victims of Gender-Based Violence.

I must comment as **I conclude** that the scourge of violence against women and children seems to be on the increase. The statistics we are observing appears to be painting a bleak picture.

There are more chances of a girl-child being abused than them finishing school.

We would like to urge men to take a proactive role in the fight against gender-based violence.

Stop the Abuse of Women and Children.

After such a difficult and demanding year, the best we can do for our women and children is to show them love, care and support during this festive season.

From the Department of Health, we wish you all a great festive season, filled with love and happiness.

Don't drink and drive. Arrive alive.

I thank you!