

## **Speaker`s remarks during Legislature staff`s World AIDS Day Celebration**

1 December 2010

Programme Director

Deputy Speaker of Mpumalanga Provincial Legislature Hon VS Siwela

Chief Whip of the Majority Party Hon BT Shongwe

Honourable Members of the Mpumalanga Provincial Legislature present here today

The Management of the Mpumalanga Provincial Legislature under the stewardship of Mr. Moropa; the Secretary to the Legislature

Our Special Guest Ms. T Nkomo from Treatment Action Campaign (TAC)

Leadership of Civil Society Organisations and HIV/AIDS Activists

Members of Staff

Distinguished Guests

The Legislature choir has improved so much, I am sure if the Chairperson of NCOP Hon. MJ Mahlangu was present here today he was going to finally agree that you can give the choir of parliament a strong competition.

Ladies and Gentlemen

We are once again gathered here as part of the global community of nations who have dedicated this day to mark the International World Aids Day. We join people of the World who have collectively agreed that we need more collaborative efforts to win the battle against HIV/AIDS. Our assembly here today represent our collective consciousness of our past and the present circumstances plus our belief that humankind shall triumph the battle against HIV/AIDS.

Indeed HIV and AIDS is still the most cause for concern throughout the world and it has continuously kept every individual, organizations, government and other formations within societies in search for solutions. We are all conscious of the fact that HIV/ AIDS has affected all of us irrespective of our race, gender, position in society, background, economic status, and political affiliation, level of education and location or country.

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is estimated that about 33.4 million people in the world are living with HIV and AIDS out of which more than 5.6 millions are found in South Africa. It should however be noted that the South African Government under the leadership of the African National Congress, and the stewardship of His Excellency President Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma within the collective effort of cabinet members and the cooperation of the society at large, there are positive developments in this regard and a lot has been done to deal with the challenge presented by HIV/AIDS, however a lot more needs to be done.

The time of excessively celebrating the impact of HIV/AIDS by continuously lamenting on the challenges presented by the scourge of the HIV/AIDS pandemic has long passed by, as it was pronounced by his Excellency President Zuma on the World AIDS Day 2009 Commemoration at Pretoria Show-grounds when he said "Now is not the time to lament. It is the time to act decisively, and to act together. Our message is simple. We have to stop the spread of HIV. We must reduce the rate of new infections. Prevention is our most powerful weapon against the epidemic. All South Africans should take steps to ensure that they do not become infected, that they do not infect others and that they know their status. Each individual must take responsibility for protection against HIV".

The clarion call by the State President in 2009 called for an immediate shift of mindset and attitude to swiftly move from words to decisive action. It invited all members of the society to occupy the centre stage in the battle against HIV/AIDS by acting responsible and putting hold on new infections. It said we are all responsible.

As I said in 2009 I wish to once again re-emphasise the fact that the struggle against HIV/AIDS is the battle for self preservation by humankind. In order to achieve our desired goal we need to

unapologetically pursue the twin tasks of the Struggle against HIV/AIDS i.e. to extend the life expectancy of those living positively with HIV/AIDS and to also prevent new infections as per the call by the State President in 2009.

Ladies and Gentlemen

As we are gathered here today, we take this opportunity and congratulate the Government of the Republic of South Africa for taking a radical stance against HIV/AIDS through the Major Policy shifts pronounced in the year 2009. I must say that it is however incumbent upon all citizens to complement the policy by acting responsible. All married couples or people in steady relationships should create a new standard to openly speak about protected sexual intercourse and usage of condoms. This should be adopted as a sign of love and care for each other and commitment to life. It has been realised that HIV/AIDS affect people who are in stable relationship due to the belief that it is not necessary for people in stable relationship to use condoms due to mutual trust. Yet many of them perish due to past or unforeseen exposure to HIV/AIDS.

During this celebration we note with appreciation the declined infection rate in South Africa where new infections are reported to have fallen back by 100 000. We hope that due to the radical approach of the state over the past 12 months, when we commemorate World AIDS day next year we shall have achieved more than 100% progress from the current reduction levels. Once again we re-emphasise the need to keep those infected healthy and alive but also to prevent new infection. We support the prevention of Mother to Child transmission programme as we firmly believe that no child deserves to be born HIV positive and it has been proven possible.

As we commemorate we extend our hearts and love to those who endured the pain of loss of loved ones, those who endured the pain of sickness due to HIV/AIDS related diseases. We pay tribute to those who care for the sick frail. We extend our love to children who have lost their parents and parents who have lost their beloved children. We salute those who have continuously provided support and comfort to those who nearly lost hope about the future including spiritual leaders and HIV/AIDS counsellors. Our Sympathy and Love goes to all these unsung heroes and heroines of our motherland.

Ladies and Gentlemen

As I conclude I wish to once again direct your wisdom to the words pronounced by His Excellency President Zuma on the 1st of December 2009 when he said "At another moment in our history, in another context, the liberation movement observed that the time comes in the life of any nation when there remain only two choices: submit or fight. That time has now come in our struggle to overcome AIDS.

Let us declare now, as we declared then, that we shall not submit."

If we can all here today acknowledge that we are all responsible. We should also dedicate this time to commit ourselves towards elimination of Violence against Women and Children as it directly contributes towards the spread of HIV/AIDS. Violence coupled with sexual abuse largely targets the weak and the vulnerable elements of our society. During this 16 Days of Activism on no Violence against Women and children, we should not look away and act decisively.

As we move forward, let us draw inspiration from the Lyrics derived from Charles Tindley's gospel song "I'll Overcome Some Day" unfortunately I am not a good singer I can't sing the lyrics but it was going to be great if it was sung the song but I will read:

We shall overcome  
We shall overcome  
We shall overcome some day

Oh, deep in my heart  
I do believe  
We shall overcome some day

We`ll walk hand in hand  
We`ll walk hand in hand  
We`ll walk hand in hand some day

We shall all be free  
We shall all be free  
We shall all be free some day  
We are not afraid  
We are not afraid  
We are not afraid some day

We are not alone  
We are not alone  
We are not alone some day

The whole wide world around  
The whole wide world around  
The whole wide world around some day

We shall overcome  
We shall overcome  
We shall overcome some day

Allow me to voice our profound appreciation to the event coordinators and members of EAP and staff for once again putting their efforts together to ensure that we once again collectively celebrate this day. Indeed, working together we can do more to combat the scourge of HIV/AIDS. Truly, I believe that working together we shall overcome HIV/AIDS

Thank You.