

Address by President Jacob Zuma on the occasion of World AIDS Day

Compiled by the Government Communication and Information System

01 Dec 2009 (at the Pretoria Showgrounds)

Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe,
The Minister of Health Dr Aaron Motsoaledi and all Ministers and Deputy Ministers present,
Premier of Gauteng Nomvula Mokonyane and MECs present,
Executive Mayor of Tshwane Dr Gwen Ramokgopa,
Deputy Chairperson of the SA National Aids Council, Mark Heywood,
Members of the diplomatic corps,
UN Aids Executive Director Michel Sedibe and all representatives of international agencies,
Fellow South Africans,

... [W]e join millions of people across the globe to mark World Aids Day.

We join multitudes who have determined that this epidemic cannot be overcome without a concerted and coordinated effort.

We join millions who understand that the epidemic is not merely a health challenge. It is a challenge with profound social, cultural and economic consequences.

It is an epidemic that affects entire nations. Yet it touches on matters that are intensely personal and private.

Unlike many others, HIV and AIDS cannot be overcome simply by improving the quality of drinking water, or eradicating mosquitoes, or mass immunisation.

It can only be overcome by individuals taking responsibility for their own lives and the lives of those around them.

[...]

Dear Compatriots,

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. To the youth, the future belongs to you.

Be responsible and do not expose yourself to risks.

Parents and heads of households, let us be open with our children and educate them

about HIV and how to prevent it.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are still marking the 16 days of activism against violence on women and children. During this period, it is important that we also remember to uphold the rights of women and children, including their right to protection from infection with HIV.

Many women are unable to negotiate for protection due to unequal power relations in relationships.

As we mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities on Thursday, the 3rd of December, let us remember the impact of HIV on persons with disability.

We have to tailor government programmes and messages to also speak to the needs of this sector.

Fellow South Africans,

To take our response a step forward, we are launching a massive campaign to mobilise all South Africans to get tested for HIV.

Every South African should know his or her HIV status. To prepare for a continuous voluntary testing campaign, we would like to announce a few new measures, to expand our response.

All children under one year of age will get treatment if they test positive. Initiating treatment will therefore not be determined by the level of CD cells. This decision will contribute significantly towards the reduction of infant mortality over time.

All patients with both TB and HIV will get treatment with anti-retrovirals if their CD4 count is 350 or less. At present treatment is available when the CD4 count is less than 200. TB and HIV/Aids will now be treated under one roof. This policy change will address early reported deaths arising from undetected TB infection among those who are infected with HIV.

We have taken this step, particularly on learning that approximately 1% of our population has TB and that the co-infection between TB and HIV is 73%.

All pregnant HIV positive women with a CD4 count of 350 or with symptoms regardless of CD4 count will have access to treatment. At present HIV positive pregnant women are eligible for treatment if their CD4 count is less than 200.

All other pregnant women not falling into this category, but who are HIV positive, will be put on treatment at fourteen weeks of pregnancy to protect the baby. In the past this was only started during the last term of pregnancy.

In order to meet the need for testing and treatment, we will work to ensure that all the health institutions in the country are ready to receive and assist patients and not just a

few accredited ARV centres. Any citizen should be able to move into any health centre and ask for counselling, testing and even treatment if needed.

The implementation of all these announcements is effective from April 2010. Institutions are hard at work to ensure that systems are in place by the 31st of March.

What does this all mean? It means that we will be treating significantly larger numbers of HIV positive patients. It means that people will live longer and more fulfilling lives.

What does it NOT mean? It does not mean that we should be irresponsible in our sexual practices.

It does not mean that people do not have to practice safer sex. It does not mean that people should not use condoms consistently and correctly during every sexual encounter.

We can eliminate the scourge of HIV if all South Africans take responsibility for their actions.

I need to re-emphasise at this point that we must intensify our prevention efforts if we are to turn off the tap of new HIV and TB infections. Prevention is our most powerful and effective weapon.

We have to overcome HIV the same way that it spreads - one individual at a time. We have to really show that all of us are responsible.

The HIV tests are voluntary and they are confidential. We know that it is not easy. It is a difficult decision to take.

But it is a decision that must be taken by people from all walks of life, of all races, all social classes, all positions in society. HIV does not discriminate.

I am making arrangements for my own test. I have taken HIV tests before, and I know my status. I will do another test soon as part of this new campaign. I urge you to start planning for your own tests.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are also mindful of the social impact of the epidemic, and continue to provide psycho-social support and home based care, through the Home Community Based Care and child care programmes of government.

Let me use this opportunity to salute all our caregivers including those neighbours who assist and support families in distress.

We also thank our international partners, who continue to provide material support to our campaign against AIDS.

On this day, our hearts go out to all South Africans who are in distress as a result of this epidemic. To families looking after sick relatives, we wish you strength. We

understand what you are going through.

To those who have lost their loved ones to the epidemic we share your pain, and extend our deepest condolences.

Fellow South Africans,

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.

We have no choice but to deploy every effort, mobilise every resource, and utilise every skill that our nation possesses, to ensure that we prevail in this struggle for the health and prosperity of our nation.

History has demonstrated the strength of a nation united and determined.

We are a capable, innovative and motivated people.

Together we fought and defeated a system so corrupt and reviled that it was described as a crime against humanity.

Together we can overcome this challenge.

Let today be the dawn of a new era.

Let there be no more shame, no more blame, no more discrimination and no more stigma.

Let the politicisation and endless debates about HIV and AIDS stop.

Let this be the start of an era of openness, of taking personal responsibility, and of working together in unity to prevent HIV infections and to deal with its impact.

Working together, we can achieve these goals!

I thank you.

<http://www.buanews.gov.za/news/09/09120113551001>