

Statement by the Hon. Deputy Prime  
Minister of the Republic of Namibia at the  
Official Opening  
of the VCT Center  
at Keetmanshoop,

1st March 2005

Esteemed Representatives of the American Administration,  
Social Marketing Association Members,  
Members of Catholic Aids Action Employees of New Start Center,  
Distinguished Community Leaders,  
Members of Keetmanshoop community,

The HIV / Aids pandemic is no more a mere question for the medical discipline. It has become a very fundamental developmental and socio- economic issue. In fact, in my own analysis, the question of HIV / Aids has expanded to the level of geo-political considerations as well.

In the medical discipline, attempts to find a cure are still ongoing. Hitherto however, drugs that are able to prolong life have been found, and Namibia too is benefiting from such drugs already. We are grateful for the assistance rendered in this regard.

At the level of socio-economic considerations, this pandemic has come to limit economic output, and is due to inflict even greater harm to our fragile and weak economies. As a social matter, also, the life expectancy is expected to drop even further to 40 years.

According to a recently published study by the Namibia Planned Parenthood Association at the Health Conference in Windhoek, there has been a drop in life expectancy since 1995, from 58 years to 43 in 2003 and now still further down to 40 years.

By virtue of this statistical evidence, it becomes clearer daily that the HIV / Aids pandemic poses a historic challenge to the billions of the citizens of this planet, for their very survival as a human race.

Dear Friends,

HIV / Aids is also a geo-political manifestation, reflecting the geo-political wealth-and-poverty distribution among nations of this world. To state the obvious, those wealthy nations are far less affected and have far lower rates of infection. Those nations of the world that are inflicted with poverty, are far more prone to higher infections in general.

Of course, I am not discounting the fact that there are also other reasons for high rates of infection in our countries. These include behavior, cultural norms and practices to mention some of the reasons only. But that they are the sole fundamental causes of high infections, is an argument I reject.

I wish to make a further argument, that HIV / Aids risks the security and stability, not only of the nation-state, but of the world at large, as the scramble for resources could intensify. For example, countries such as Namibia, with their small population, might witness a situation where our workforce in critical areas of the economy are depleted due to illness and death. As a result, we may have to bring in workers from other states to fill such gaps locally.

When this happens, tensions could rise as such ex patriots may be seen as either taking over resources and industries at expense of nationals. Inter-state relations could also be affected in this manner. These are some of the tensions and security threats and challenges that could be consequences of this pandemic.

Ladies and gentlemen,

HIV / Aids expounds the very fundamental, and perhaps, for some, a controversial question of global social and economic justice, and the lack thereof. Had there been global social justice, there would not have been a billion illiterate persons in the world. Had there been global social justice, we would not have had billions living in absolute poverty, lacking sanitation, basic health

care, access to education and all other essential amenities vital for the maintenance of a decent and respectable life.

For us as humanity to overcome this pandemic, it is pivotal that global efforts at eradicating absolute poverty are focused, and that underdevelopment, which in many instances is a direct result of economic oppression, are removed so that the world can witness a new dawn of a just international community, serving humanity.

Director of Ceremony,

HIV / Aids, should be understood as linked to poverty itself, in the analytical context I drew above. This disease is for me, and for us in Africa in particular, a double-edged sword: it overwhelmingly derives from poverty and exclusion, in the global order, and creates even greater poverty, exclusion, destitution, social and community disintegration and personal and individual maladjustment. This pandemic in my view therefore, is a not only a repetition of poverty and exclusion, but is the conveyer belt for further large scale and untold poverty in the so-called third world.

Director of Ceremony,

I am grateful that these Centers are opened with the kind and generous help from our American friends and partners. We are happy that counseling and testing can be done here, amidst the community, so that they can easily access services where they are.

I praise the efforts by the American Administration to give their input to alleviate the impact of this pandemic. Your help does not go unseen.

I also thank the Roman Catholic Church and Catholic Aids Action for their vision and generosity, for providing care for the needy and for running these

centers here and elsewhere for the benefit of all our people. Accept the appreciation and gratitude on behalf of the government, your work is very special indeed. Keep on with this good work.

May I say, that the ingredient to secure that we halt the spread of this disease lies in maintaining a healthy lifestyle, not to hope for the founding of a cure for the disease. It would mean to be disciplined in the kind of lifestyle that secures safety from infection.

HIV / Aids is no longer a death sentence, its effect and impact can now be mitigated, by staying disciplined in your lifestyle, and by eating the right kinds of food. Of course we know of our own poverty, and we all cannot afford to have healthy food all the time, but we can always find ways of surviving, such as refraining from alcohol abuse while infected, so that your immune system is not further weakened and so on.

This lifestyle is vital, especially in Keetmanshoop, where roughly 16 % of the Keetmanshoop community is affected by HIV / Aids. Everyone is touched by this disease, all of us are affected one way or the other.

These of you who are infected and affected with HIV/Aids, I say to you, don't despair, we are all with you, as a nation. We understand what you are going through, and we are ready to help. This is but one way to help, there are other sorts of help made by the government, and so don't feel all is lost. Live your lives as productive and equal citizens of Namibia, you are all our own brothers, sisters, daughters, sons and countrymen and women, and we love you so much! I wish you all the best and urge you all to make use of these centers, tell others not here today about these centers, and come to know about your status, it helps to know, and to be helped early.

With these encouraging words, I declare this VCT of Keetmanshoop officially open.

Thank you very much and good day.