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*MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION
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**AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING
OF THE
POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA'S 14 ANNUAL HIV/AIDS
AWARENESS CAMPAIGN**

POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA, WINDHOEK

06 MAY 2010

Program Director, Mr. Jotam Muuondjo, *Project Officer,
Polytechnic of Namibia*

Mr. Fabian Buoymuhangi, *UNFPA Country Representative*

Dr. Tjama Tjivikua, *The Rector of the Polytechnic,*

Ms. Frieda Shimbuli, *Dean of Students*

Ms. Alta McNally, *Student Counsellor and HIV/AIDS Coordinator
at the Polytechnic*

The Management and Staff of the Polytechnic of Namibia

Distinguished invited guests

Members of the Media

Dear Students

Ladies & Gentlemen

I am very pleased to have been accorded this opportunity to address you this morning, on the occasion of the 14th Polytechnic of Namibia HIV/AIDS Awareness Campaign. I am particularly delighted that I address you so soon after the **“Be Strong, Get Tested” Campaign**, spearheaded by Nawa Life Trust on 27 April 2010 and before the National HIV Testing Campaign scheduled for 20 May 2010. I hope that most of you will participate in these events and in that way contribute to the eradication of the ills imposed on us, as a young nation, by HIV/AIDS.

Today will go down in the history of our country as yet another milestone in our collective efforts to combat the scourge of HIV/AIDS.

In particular, the involvement of the Polytechnic of Namibia in the battle against HIV/AIDS continues to make an immeasurable impact.

I must congratulate the Polytechnic for organising this 14th Annual HIV/AIDS Awareness Campaign. This and many other commendable efforts on the part of the Polytechnic are a concrete expression of our commitment to the **Break the Chain** HIV/AIDS call. The government is also heartened by the unprecedented groundswell of support from civil society organisations and institutions of higher learning for the **Break the Chain** HIV/AIDS campaign. I want to believe that this call has unleashed a powerful social movement against HIV/AIDS.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The battle against HIV/AIDS is far from over. According to UNAIDS statistics, about 33.4 million people were living with HIV/AIDS in 2008, compared to about 8 million in 1990. In simple mathematics that means that the number of people living with HIV/AIDS increased by four-fold in less than twenty years during that period. Today the figure could be much higher. I should hasten to add here that out of that total, around 67% of people living with HIV are in sub-Saharan Africa. About 2.7 million people were newly infected with HIV in 2008 and 2.0 million died of AIDS-related diseases in the same year. More than 25 million people have died of AIDS since 1981; and Africa alone has today over 14 million AIDS orphans.

The sad part is that according to the same source, the SADC Region has the highest adult HIV prevalence rate in the world, with nine SADC countries occupying the first nine positions in the world.

Namibia with an estimated 15.3% infection rate, is said to be the fifth most infected country in the whole world. This is confirmed research carried out by Take Control, that 1 in 8 Namibians is living with HIV. The situation is thus more serious than most of us care to admit, or to change our attitudes and actions.

Distinguished Guests,

Sub-Saharan Africa is indeed severely affected by the AIDS pandemic. The pandemic is no longer seen as a health matter only; it is also a social problem. The epidemic is a threat to the development of the whole nation. It affects the economic, political and social sectors of our society.

There is no cure for AIDS yet, thus prevention and medication are seen as the best ways to put a hold to the epidemic. It is therefore important to determine whether prevention programmes are successful or not in order to reduce risky sexual behaviour and to reduce the level of new infections.

Talking about new infections, in-depth research was done prior the “Break the Chain” National Campaign by Take Control and other partners. It was found that one of the key drivers of the epidemic and in the spread of HIV in Namibia is the appearance of multiple and concurrent partnerships.

Although HIV rates seem to be dropping according to the Sentinel Surveys carried out by the Ministry of Health, Namibia - as we have noted - still has one of the highest HIV rates in the world. Among the reasons why people are still infected are low risk perception, inconsistent condom use, low levels of male circumcision, alcohol abuse and multiple and concurrent partnerships that I referred to earlier.

Dear Students,

Research further shows that many young people engaged in multiple sexual partnerships put themselves at risk for sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV. Concurrent sexual partnerships, which refers to people having more than one sexual partner for a long period of time, is another contributing factor in the spread of HIV.

Avoiding multiple and concurrent sexual partnerships is a key prevention communication strategy in the current campaign, and requires a deeper understanding amongst the sexually active population in Namibia, which includes you as the future leaders of Namibia.

Such a strategy is a focal area of prevention for 2010/2011 and is being rolled out as part of the Take Control National Media Campaign, **“Break the Chain”**. It is coordinated by the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology and operates within the framework provided by national plans for HIV prevention.

Another worrisome factor that is directly linked with multiple and concurrent partnerships, especially amongst the youth, is the linkage between alcohol, drug abuse and the spread of HIV/AIDS. These two challenges are devastating in their own right and much more when taken together.

Alcohol abuse contributes to a wide range of social and health problems. Numerous studies carried out by the Ministry of Health and Social Services revealed that alcohol abuse is a direct factor in the abuse and rape of women and children. Furthermore, alcohol abuse leads to violent crimes and to young people having unprotected and often promiscuous sex. We must therefore seek to re-address this situation as a matter of urgency.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Young people, those between 15-35 years of age, remain the most susceptible to HIV/AIDS and are also the target audience for the **“Break the Chain”** campaign. Interestingly, however, it is also this group that has the largest capacity to curb the spread of the disease. It is therefore important that young people should be the main focus of HIV/AIDS prevention programmes.

As I stated earlier, this campaign could not have come at a more opportune time, just before the National HIV Testing Day on May 20th, where you as young people can reaffirm your commitment to the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Programme Director,

Ladies and Gentlemen

We should zoom in on the aims of the 14th Polytechnic HIV/AIDS awareness campaign which is commemorated under the same theme as the National campaign, "**Break the Chain**".

The campaign is split into two phases: **Phase one** is to raise awareness on sexual networks and the risk they pose. **Phase two** explains how to break free from sexual networks through partner reduction or how to reduce risks through consistent condom use. The campaign is further guided by a two-year strategic plan which is modelled around the following milestones:

- 1) Raise awareness of sexual network risks;
- 2) Promote clear strategies to reduce risks posed by sexual networks;
- 3) Address underlying factors of Multiple and Concurrent Partnerships (such as long-distance relationships, communication skills, sexual dissatisfaction, promote sexual relationships within the same age groups to reduce in intergenerational transactional sex; and

- 4) Increase the use of condoms and access to VCT services within multiple and or concurrent partnerships.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you will note, this campaign aims to go beyond the increase of knowledge of young people but rather to build capacity of the student body to advance their professional lives and ensure that they remain conscientious of their lives and lifestyles.

Given this background I wish to commend the leadership of the Polytechnic, its staff and students for organising events of this nature on the campus.

I urge all students to take sincere care and exercise responsibility in your personal and social lives. Treat yourselves and your counterparts with respect, dignity and care that you all deserve. Respect and dignity are some of the principles we fought for so hard as part of the liberation of our country, and that we hope to bequeath to future generations. The effect of HIV/AIDS and its main drivers warrants serious attention from all of us. Let us unite in our concerted efforts to reduce HIV/AIDS infections in our country and to achieve the goals enshrined in our Vision 2030. Already, our public health system has begun to feel the strain. In the next few years, we may not be able to cope with the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS unless this trend is reversed.

The grim picture that I have just painted demands that all of us, collectively and individually, redouble our efforts to combat the AIDS epidemic.

The problem of AIDS is not the problem of the Ministry of Health and Social Services alone. It is not the problem of government alone. It is our problem. All of us, in our respective fields, positions or callings can contribute to the goal of defeating the scourge of AIDS.

Dear Students and Staff,

Let's Break the chain of HIV transmission by making a personal stand and refuse to have sex with a partner who has sex with many partners and by committing ourselves to only having protected sex with one partner and to getting tested regularly.

Break the Chain and Take Control!

Thank you for your kind attention!