

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

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AT THE

OFFICIAL OPENING

19<sup>TH</sup> POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA HIV/AIDS AWARENESS  
CAMPAIGN

09 SEPTEMBER 2014

O9H00

The Rector, the Polytechnic Management, staff, representatives from bilateral and multilateral organisations and most importantly the learners and student community.

I'm honoured to be the guest speaker at the 19<sup>th</sup> Polytechnic HIV/AIDS awareness campaign, with the theme “ **Unite to Fight HIV & TB**,

I should congratulate the team in the department Student Services under the leadership of the Dean of Students Ms Frieda Shimbuli. Keep the candle burning.

There was a time in my life and my work when I fought very hard for the separation of these 2 health challenges and in a short while I'll explain why.

I have been a strong.... for more forthright discussions, more aggressive advocacy and increased funding around HIV and TB. I would like to see discussions to dominate media and marketplaces not just around TB day and Aids day but for everyday and yet, as we see the end of yet another month the issues around maternal health and HIV/TB and it's impact on women and children was barely discussed.

We all know the African saying 'you strike a woman, you strike a rock' and yet we ignore the fact that the African woman is being struck very hard as the HIV pandemic lay claim to our husband's, our lovers, our children and ourselves.

Nurses call for a triage of services. Early detection for mother and child, safe and effective treatment, cost in time and money.

As an academic institution I commend your efforts to take up this critical health issue HIV/AIDS serious and address it annually as an institution to halt the spread of this deadly scourge. It's fundamental that institutions such as yours continue to educate the nation on an academic level but moreover sensitize them on other health issues. And I hope that the education and conversations are holistic in its approach.

Because HIV/AIDS is not one dimensional, experience and time has taught that painful lesson. It's a crisis of enormous spiritual, social, economic and political proportions.

Many nations on our beautiful continent have the scars to show the emotional and physical scars of this scourge which we have just not gotten under control, and not for lack of trying!

As African nations we were confronted with mothers and babies dying after giving birth, children left orphaned and the phenomena of child-headed households became normality.

We are living through a humanitarian catastrophe, a situation that is continually threatening our economic and geopolitical stability.

Sadly this situation after so many years remains worrisome, in the sense that although deaths due to HIV/AIDS & TB increased, we still continue to have a high number of people infected with the virus. There was a time when you could sense the urgency within the health fraternity to change the status quo and a passion amongst advocates to bring awareness to political, corporate and socio group. But then terms like information and funding fatigue crept into our vocabulary.

Egos, Politics and Corruption became commonplace in the Organisations tasked with taking care of the needy, trust me, I know all about it and the real work, took a back seat.

Health facilities in all Sub Sahara Africa which has some of the highest HIV prevalence rates spent a huge amount of money on ART. But I'd be keen to know what the spending ratio is for advocacy and prevention education verses ARTs.

Ministry of Health in Namibia spent 28, 307, 185 for the year 2012 and I suspect that number has increased year on year.

It tells us that people are not changing their sexual behaviour. I believe it's time we put some money into finding out... WHY?

I believe the picture with regards to TB infection will be the same because HIV & TB are regarded as a twin epidemic. We cannot behave as if the government is drawing from a bottomless pit. TB is 100% curable if we detect the infection early enough and adhere to treatment. Governments and heavily funded organisations have been working tirelessly to bring down infection rates but more needs to be done.



I am from a country where youth activism change the face of our politics, youth activism brought the plight of the ordinary South African to the attention of the World and those youth men became the First Black leaders of a Democratic South Africa.

Ladies and Gentlemen and young leaders of Namibia, we're getting to a point where we all know someone or.. of someone who has succumbed to HIV or TB.

Our young people can no longer presume that their first sexual partner will bring them no harm. Today your first encounter **MUST** be pre-empted with 'let's have an HIV test'. This is the legacy we've left, but young people, it need not be your legacy.

You can change it!

Overcoming the pandemic and all diseases linked with it and the stigma attached to it is one of the most serious challenges of your time.

It requires courage, commitment and leadership at all levels. And now more than ever, it will require Activism and a creativity that your age and access brings to the table.

Academic leaders and institutions like the Polytechnic bring with them a special kind of trust and respect amongst the youth of your country that can help alter the course of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. But it means that you need to stand up and be counted. It means making the right decisions for your life, your partners life and for some of you, a decisions to work toward a common good for the people of Namibia, both young and old.

The scourge of HIV/AIDS cuts across all sections of the society and threatens the entire fabric of the nation faced with the daunting task of prevention, care and treatment of HIV/AIDS infected and affected people.

Sub-Saharan Africa, with the highest incidence of HIV infection, is forced to divert its scarce resources from supporting productive activities into the socio-economic sectors impacted by the pandemic. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is also one of the greatest threats to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and Vision 2030. As a key partner in

education and national development, the Polytechnic is accountable for the production of an educated and responsible workforce in order for Namibia to realize its Vision 2030.

Simply put, we cannot reduce poverty and hunger, achieve universal education, reduce child mortality rates, improve maternal health, promote gender equality and empower women to effectively participate in the development of a Global Partnership for Development, unless we fight and defeat this pandemic.

Although part of the audience today is adults, the majority are young people and I would like to make use of this platform to address the youth not only in my capacity as guest speaker or IFRC Ambassador but from personal experiences while travelling around the world.

Most people have known me as a media and celebrity in South Africa with a successful career in media and public relations personality as well as TV presenter. Others have known me as a host of the African version of the popularity show "Big brother". While I was at the height of my career, I felt ill and was diagnosed with tuberculosis. (TB). Yes, I understand your surprise because most people that I came in contact with while being ill acted exactly the same way as you are reacting now.

One thing that I found was that even authorities hide diseases such as HIV and TB because the clinics where people are treated are mostly in remote areas.

No wonder these diseases are associated mostly with the poor. The first thing I had to do was to locate a TB clinic in my district so I could start her 6-month treatment. Then I realized that even though it was only five minutes from my home in an upper class neighbourhood, I had never heard of it since it was located into such a remote place.

So what is this telling us present here today.

In many places a culture of silence or secrecy surrounds HIV/AIDS & TB and I believe the Polytechnic is no exception. I was informed that the Nurse is seeing cases of TB on campus remember that TB is curable, just stick to your regime, comply to your treatment and encourage others to do the same.



I was also informed that you don't have a Rapid testing centre on campus yet, when it arrives, I hope you will all be lined up to ensure your future wellbeing.

The Polytechnic is uniquely posed to break the silence on these diseases through its HIV Policy by acknowledging the suffering of and reaching out with compassion to the excluded and rejected. You can open the way to reconciliation, wider understanding, healing, prevention and care especially among the young people but also among your staff who might be infected or affected in one or the other way.

I would further like to challenge you as an institution and young people to become part of the goals that will be adopted at the United Nations General Assembly this September to change the world.

Part of these goals is to end poverty but on their own they won't end poverty.

We need to make it a collective effort and make sure that leaders keep their promises. The fight is not over yet.

One of the goals that I would like to highlight and which will be a personal challenge for me is Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages. This goal reminds me of a quote by Martin Luther King Jr: "Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane." That's why access to healthcare and medicine is a top priority. Where you live should not be a barrier to the quality of healthcare you receive.

And then there is Goal 5 which stated : Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. This is another area which I am passionate about. Women and girls are the ones mostly infected with HIV and consequently if not treated in time or well be co-infected with TB. As President Barack Obama said on his recent trip to Kenya; "Any nation that fails to educate its girls or employ its women and allow them to maximize their potential is doomed to fall behind the global economy". Research has shown female-headed households have seen faster poverty reduction than male-headed households, as they are more likely to re-invest their money in the family. This goal will ensure that we take everyone forward in our fight against extreme poverty. If we can reduce poverty, we can reduce poor health facilities. Namibia is one step ahead of us in establishing a Ministry for Poverty Alleviation.

Young people I trust that you will on the forefront of taking up these challenges. Make time to visit the website F:\17 ways we're going to change the world ONE.mht. to see where you can make a difference.

Ladies and Gentlemen as we noted from the discussion above, taking about HIV/AIDS & TB, one is talking about individual tragedies, lives lost, families destroyed, and children without real hope.

It is my trust that your will not remain ignorant but that you will take responsibility for yourself first but remind our fellow citizens to uphold article 6 & 8 of the Namibian Constitution which speaks of respect for human life and human dignity.

We need to implement policies, programmes such as the one today that address the root causes of poverty and how it contribute to HIV and TB infection.

I thank you for your kind attention.

### **References:**

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