



WELCOMING REMARKS

**BY DR. TJAMA TJIVIKUA
RECTOR: POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA**

**AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING
OF THE
POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA'S 15TH ANNUAL HIV/AIDS AWARENESS
CAMPAIGN**

INFRONT OF E-HAUS

ON

18 MAY 2011

AT

08:30

Programme Director, Mr. Jonatam Muuondjo

Madam Pohamba, the *First Lady of the Republic of Namibia*

Dr. Gert Gunzel, *Vice Rector: Finance and Administration*

Ms. Frieda Shimbuli, *Dean of Students*

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

The Management and Staff of the Polytechnic of Namibia

Dear Students

Members of the media

Distinguished invited guests

Ladies and gentlemen

All protocol observed

On June 5th 1981, the US Center for Disease Control published a report about five men in Los Angeles. These men's immune systems appeared to have been destroyed by an unknown virus. The CDC often reported mysterious disease clusters – but the five men in this report turned out to be the forerunners of the most devastating epidemic of modern times – acquired immune deficiency syndrome – AIDS.

Since then, more than 20 million people have died from AIDS. More than twice that number live with the human immunodeficiency virus or HIV – and the number continues to grow. According to the latest research, about two thirds of those who acquire HIV are likely to get infected before they reach the age of 25. This fact is well captured in the 2004 Report on the global AIDS epidemic which states that young people between 15 and 24 years account for nearly half of all new HIV infections worldwide. HIV/AIDS thus

strikes people in their most productive years, severely disrupting the economic and social base of whole families and societies.

It is for these reasons, and because of our obligation as a university, that we bring together the leaders of our nation and our future leaders to engage in a productive dialogue on HIV/AIDS. I would therefore like to welcome everyone to the 15th HIV/AIDS Awareness Campaign of the Polytechnic of Namibia

I want to specifically welcome our keynote speaker, the First Lady of the Republic of Namibia, Madam Pohamba, for being a prominent role model, leader of our community, and advocate of knowledge communication. Thank you for accepting our invitation to be the keynote speaker. Welcome also to representatives of the sponsors of the event, American Cultural Center (about N\$ 140 000), Bokomo, UNIC and My Health Administrators, all exhibitors, invited guests and all students. Without your participation and generous sponsorships, this event could not have taken place.

Our Dean of Students, Ms. Frieda Shimbuli, and her dedicated staff, especially Ms. Alta McNally, Student Counsellor and HIV/AIDS coordinator at the Polytechnic, as well as the members of the Polytechnic AIDS Awareness Club deserve our heartfelt appreciation. HIV/AIDS awareness raising events like this one, play a vital role to increase awareness about HIV/AIDS among our students and staff. Therefore I want to sincerely assure you that your efforts have not gone unnoticed.

Director of Ceremonies,

Young people across the world are particularly vulnerable to HIV infection – there are many reasons for this. They may not have the necessary knowledge, life skills and information to protect themselves against HIV. On the other hand, they may have the requisite knowledge, know all the risk factors and yet go right ahead and take risks – including indulging in casual sex, unprotected sex or intravenous drug use. After all, youth is often an age of experimentation, the age when we think ‘It won’t happen to me.’

In the worst hit countries there is an additional burden on young people. As parents and older children fall victim to AIDS, an extraordinary load is placed on the younger family members. They not only have to take care of their ill family members, but also have to find employment to support their family.

When talking about HIV/AIDS, young people are often placed in the high-risk category. However, young people are not only part of the HIV/AIDS problem but can also be part of the solution. Young people – like most of you here today – are in a unique position to make important contributions in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Research suggests that people are more likely to listen to and internalise messages if they believe that the messenger is one of them. When faced with problems, young people more often turn to their friends – whom they think face the same problems and pressures – rather than to an adult.

You are, therefore, key agents for influencing your peers in a positive way. Other young people will see you as a credible source of information and are likely to look to you as a role model.

In the fight against HIV/AIDS, prevention is the best defence – knowledge and information are the first line of defence against HIV/AIDS. So you should arm yourself with facts about HIV/AIDS – you need to be sure that the information you have is accurate and up-to-date, and know how to separate the facts from the myths or misconceptions.

What are some of the facts? You need to know that there has been a progressive rise in new cases of HIV/AIDS, both in Namibia and world-wide. You need to know that HIV/AIDS is an unbiased disease – it can happen to anyone, regardless of social class, race, IQ or sexuality. HIV/AIDS can happen to you whether you are gay or “straight.”

There are four main modes of transmission, which I am sure you are all familiar with – sexual transmission, intravenous drug use involving the sharing of infected needles, blood transfusions and from mother to unborn baby or from nursing mother to baby. I urge you to find out more about each of these modes of transmission and to think about what measures you can take to protect yourself.

Know what puts you at risk of getting infected. Casual sex, unprotected sex, multiple partners – all these put you at risk of acquiring HIV infection. Being young and otherwise healthy does not protect you if you choose to indulge in risky behaviour. There are young people like you who have been infected with HIV.

Another important fact to know is that people who are infected with HIV do not look any different from you or me, and there is so far no cure for AIDS, nor is there a vaccine to protect you against HIV/AIDS.

The next line of defence after acquiring knowledge and information is using the information you have acquired. Once you've got the facts down – and you believe in them – it is important that you 'walk the talk' – start being a role model for the young people around you; at your school or at the Polytechnic. The bottom-line is that peer education does work – and can provide the support needed to develop healthy norms and to make healthy decisions.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Polytechnic's Annual HIV/AIDS Awareness Campaign is therefore part of a comprehensive campaign in which different partners and stakeholders, e.g. Government, UN agencies and NGOs are involved. I believe that together we can make a difference.

Once again, it is my pleasure to welcome you to the Polytechnic's 15th Annual HIV/AIDS Awareness Campaign. **Let us be the change that we want to see.**

I thank you.
