

**SPEECH
UNAIDS COUNTRY DIRECTOR
ON THE OCCASION OF
SENATE RETREAT- SUSTENANCE OF PARLIAMENTARY HIV/AIDS
INTERVENTION IN THE FACE OF COVID-19**

- **YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESSES**
- **SENATE PRESIDENT**
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- **DISTINGUISHED SENATORS**
- **CLERK TO PARLIAMENT**
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- **NATIONAL EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF NERCHA**
- **SENIOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS**
- **REPRESENTATIVES OF UN AGENCIES AND DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS**
- **AMICAALL-ESWATINI DIRECTOR**
- **MEMBERS OF THE MEDIA**
- **LADIES AND GENTLEMEN**

I GREET YOU ALL, SANIBONANI BEKUNENE.

I AM DELIGHTED AND DEEPLY HONOURED TO HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS SENATE RETREAT FOCUSING ON SUSTENANCE OF PARLIAMENTARY HIV/AIDS INTERVENTION IN THE FACE OF COVID-19.

DISTINGUISHED SENATORS AS WE ALL ARE AWARE THAT SINCE THE DETECTION OF THE FIRST CASE OF HIV IN 1986, THE COUNTRY HAS SEEN THIS DISEASE GROW INTO AN EPIDEMIC OF ENORMOUS PROPORTIONS. *LIVE LESWATINI* HAS COME A LONG WAY IN THE FIGHT AGAINST HIV/AIDS AND WE HAVE MADE GREAT INROADS.

ESWATINI HAS BECOME A SHINNING EXAMPLE FOR THE CONTINENT AND THE WORLD AT LARGE AFTER ITS ATTAINMENT OF THE 95-95-95 UNAIDS TREATMENT CASCADE TARGET. TRANSLATING TO 95% OF PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV KNOWING THEIR HIV STATUS, 95% OF PEOPLE WHO KNOW THEIR STATUS RECEIVING

TREATMENT AND 95% OF PEOPLE ON HIV TREATMENT HAVING A SUPPRESSED VIRAL LOAD.

WHILE WE CELEBRATE THIS ACHIEVEMENT *BEKUNENE*, THE FACT THAT ESWATINI HAS REACHED AND SURPASSED THE UNAIDS TREATMENT CASCADE TARGETS DOES NOT EQUATE TO THE END OF THE HIV EPIDEMIC IN THE KINGDOM, THIS ACHIEVEMENT SERVES AS A MEANS TOWARDS ATTAINMENT OF THE GLOBAL TARGET OF ZERO NEW INFECTIONS-ZERO AIDS RELATED DEATHS AND ZERO STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION BY 2030. THEREFORE, FASK TRACKING HIV PREVENTION STRATEGIES ARE NEEDED TO BRIDGE THE GAP TO A 0-0-0 ACHIEVEMENT.

WE ALL RECALL THAT HIS MAJESTY KING MSWATI III HAS COMMANDED ALL OF US - PARLIAMENT, GOVERNMENT, COMMUNITY LEADERS, BOBABE TIKHULU, DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS AND THE ENTIRE SWAZI NATION TO ENSURE THAT SWAZI CITIZENS ARE FREE OF AIDS BY 2022. AS THE KING SAID DURING THE OFFICIAL OPENEING OF PARLIAMENT 'LET EVERYONE CONTINUE TO TAKE HIV AS OUR NATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY TO MAKE SURE WE DO NOT REVERSE THE GAINS THAT WE HAVE ATTAINED'

WE HAVE A FRAGILE WINDOW TO ENSURE THAT THE COUNTRY IS ON TRACK TO END THE AIDS EPIDEMIC. SEIZING THIS OPPORTUNITY TO FAST TRACK THE RESPONSE WILL SAVE THOUSANDS OF LIVES— AND THE COSTS OF NOT DOING SO ARE UNTHINKABLE.

ALTHOUGH MOMENTUM IS BUILDING THE PACE OF ACTION IS STILL NOT ENOUGH TO END THE AIDS EPIDEMIC AS A PUBLIC HEALTH THREAT. IN ORDER TO STEP UP PROGRESS ESWATINI ADOPTED A FAST-TRACK APPROACH, THAT WILL SEE

1. **ACCELERATED** IMPLEMENTATION OF HIV PREVENTION AND TREATMENT SERVICES THAT ADDRESS UNDERLYING BARRIERS TO ACCESS;
2. **TARGETTED** IMPLEMENTION REACHING POPULATIONS AT HIGHER RISK)
3. **HIGH IMPACT** IMPLEMENTATION REACHING BOYS & MEN AND YOUNG WOMEN AND ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN THE GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATIONS WHERE MOST HIV TRANSMISSION IS OCCURRING.

THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC HAS BROUGHT ABOUT A LOT OF CHALLENGES WITHIN THE HEALTH SECTOR AS IT HAS A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON HEALTH PROGRAMMES, SUCH AS ENSURING THAT PEOPLE CONTINUE TO ACCESS TESTS AND RECEIVE TREATMENT. IT IS NOTEWORTHY TO MENTION THAT INVESTMENTS IN HIV AND THE LESSONS FROM HOW COMMUNITIES HAVE RESPONDED TO HIV HAVE STRENGTHENED THE FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19. UNAIDS BELIEVES THAT COLLECTIVE EFFORTS THAT PRIORITIZE PEOPLE CAN TRANSFORM THE COVID-19 CRISIS INTO AN OPPORTUNITY TO ACCELERATE THE HIV RESPONSE AND EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS).

TO BUILD ON THE HIV RESPONSE GAINS MADE SO FAR, UNAIDS IS PROPOSING A NEW SET OF TARGETS FOR 2026 THAT, IF ACHIEVED, WILL MAKE THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 3.3 OF ENDING THE AIDS EPIDEMIC BY 2030 POSSIBLE. THESE TARGETS ARE HOLISTIC, THEY FOCUS ON A HIGH COVERAGE OF HIV AND SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES TOGETHER WITH THE REMOVAL OF BAD LAWS AND POLICIES AND ON REDUCING STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION. THESE TARGETS ADDRESS THE INEQUALITIES ON WHICH HIV, COVID-19 AND OTHER PANDEMICS THRIVE AND PUT PEOPLE AT THE CENTRE, ESPECIALLY THE PEOPLE MOST AT RISK AND THE MARGINALIZED.

IMPORTANT TO NOTE IS THAT, A GROWING AND COMPELLING BODY OF EVIDENCE DEMONSTRATES THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNITY-LED AND PEOPLE-CENTRED HIV RESPONSES. COMMUNITIES HAVE SERVED LEADING ROLES IN THE DEVELOPMENT, PILOTING AND EVALUATION OF DIFFERENTIATED HIV SERVICE DELIVERY MODELS, WHICH HAVE IN TURN HAD A TRANSFORMATIVE EFFECT ON THE DELIVERY OF HIV TREATMENT SERVICES, ENABLING PROGRAMMES TO TAILOR APPROACHES TO THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES

DISTINGUISHED SENATORS, YOUR LEADERSHIP IS NEEDED NOW MORE THAN EVER. WE NEED YOUR HELP TO BUILD AND STRENGTHEN GOVERNMENTAL RESPONSE AND ACCOUNTABILITY OR WE WILL NOT REACH OUR GOAL OF

UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO HIV PREVENTION, TREATMENT AND CARE SERVICES OR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS – TWO COMMITMENTS THAT OUR GOVERNMENT HAS SIGNED ONTO AND WHICH ARE NECESSARY TO OVERCOME HIV.

LET ME EMPHASISE THAT UNAIDS AND INDEED THE NATION LOOKS TO YOU AS EXEMPLARS OF INTEGRITY, RESPONSIVENESS AND ACCOUNTABILITY. WE BELIEVE THAT AS PUBLIC SERVANTS, YOU CAN SET PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL EXAMPLES OF OPENNESS AND COMMITMENT TO ADDRESS THE INEQUITIES AND DENIAL THAT FUEL THE AIDS RESPONSE.

AS OPINION-LEADERS AND DECISION-MAKERS, YOU CAN PROMOTE RESPECT AMONG YOUR CONSTITUENTS FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV, AND CAN ENCOURAGE INFORMED DEBATE ON ISSUES RELATED TO HIV, BASED ON SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE AND HUMAN RIGHTS – NOT MYTHS, IDEOLOGIES OR PREJUDICES .

DISTINGUISHED SENATORS, IF I MAY BE SO BOLD, I WOULD LIKE TO ASK YOUR ASSISTANCE IN DOING THE FOLLOWING:

FIRST, PLEASE SPEAK OUT – PERSONALLY – AGAINST STIGMA, DISCRIMINATION, GENDER INEQUALITY AND THE OTHER DRIVERS OF THE AIDS EPIDEMIC. MEET PUBLICLY WITH PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV, AND CALL FOR TOLERANCE, NON-DISCRIMINATION AND EQUAL RIGHTS FOR WOMEN, CHILDREN AND OTHER VULNERABLE POPULATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EPIDEMIC.

SECOND, HOLISTICALLY ADDRESS STRUCTURAL DRIVERS OF THE EPIDEMIC, SUCH AS GENDER INEQUALITY AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN. FOR THE RESPONSE TO THE EPIDEMIC TO BE SUCCESSFUL, NATIONAL HIV RESPONSES NEED TO BE REORIENTED TO SUPPORT WOMEN’S EQUALITY INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE HOME AND TO PREVENT SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARMFUL TRADITIONAL PRACTICES.

FINALLY, GET THE MEN ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN THE RESPONSE

UNAIDS IS COMMITTED TO SUPPORTING ESWATINI ACHIEVE 0-0-0 BY 2030, IN THIS REGARD, OVER AND ABOVE THE WORK WE ARE DOING WITH OTHER PARTNERS, UNAIDS WILL SUPPORT PARLIAMENT WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEW HIV STRATEGIC PLAN AND FURTHER, SUPPORT CAPACITY BUILDING OF THE PARLIAMENTARIANS IN KNOWING THEIR EPIDEMIC AND PANDEMIC .

I VERY MUCH LOOK FORWARD TO THE DISCUSSIONS THAT WILL UNFOLD OVER THE NEXT DAYS.

THANK YOU- NGIYABONGA KHAKULU

“NINE BAKANGWANE I-HIV YINDZABA YETFU SONKHE”