

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICE COMMISSION



**THE CLOSING ADDRESS OF THE NATIONAL
ASSEMBLY ACU WORKSHOP**

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THE CLOSING ADDRESS AT THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ACU HIV/AIDS WORKSHOP

When I spoke to you yesterday at the Opening Session and presented the topic on the “Government’s response to the HIV/AIDS infection,” I could tell from several faces in the room that they were wondering what this workshop was all about. That is why I began my speech by asking you whether all of you are aware how the HIV/AIDS virus enters the human body. And all of you told me they were pretty well aware.

This is the mystery about AIDS. It seems like a misnomer for anybody today to claim that they want to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS. Everybody is aware there is HIV/AIDS. All of us have lost friends, colleagues, relatives and acquaintances to AIDS. Nobody should therefore be told about AIDS.

However, our response to the challenges posed by the HIV/AIDS infection is embarrassingly ambivalent. People still display the risky behaviour in their lifestyle regarding sex. We have totally refused to conform to decent behaviour and we joke about it everyday. There is no cure for AIDS. AIDS is got through sexual intercourse. AIDS kills. All of us must therefore avoid having multiple sex-partners.

But we do not want to listen. It is only others who can get AIDS, not me!! Sex among adults is a very personal thing which is done knowingly but

secretly. It is negotiated for and the two always reach a deal between themselves without a third party.

Wait a minute! Are you safe? Who will ask their spouse that question? Some married couples get AIDS because they trust each other. It is true some people also get infected because of the inherent risks in their professions. There may be lazy and careless health workers who could mishandle their patients. A patient could also get AIDS through blood transfusion. All of us are therefore exposed to the risks of being infected with HIV/AIDS virus.

This workshop has made a very simple attempt to sensitize all of us to these dangers so that armed with the correct information, we could do a lot to avoid infection and in case we are infected, we might take a better care of ourselves. Those of us who are not infected should also ensure that they strive to remain negative. But they should go a step further: they must join in the fight to assist the infected and the affected to cope with the devastating problems caused to society by the HIV/AIDS infection.

It is a fact that while many of our people still die of AIDS, there are wonder drugs in the market which can reverse some of the notorious AIDS symptoms, relieve sufferers of the serious effects of AIDS so that they may live a normal life. Letting our people die of AIDS robs us the valuable time we require to do other more productive work because we must take care of the sick. What is worse about AIDS is that it hits our people very selectively. The disease is known to hit the youth much harder because they belong to an age bracket which is more sexual activity. These are the people

who are supposed to work and earn money, pay taxes and generally run the economy. The HIV/AIDS is therefore killing our economy by eliminating the most productive group of our population leaving behind the children and the aged.

During the workshop, you have been addressed by doctors, nutritionists, but most importantly, by people who are infected and have gone public about their status. You have seen them yourselves. You have heard them speak about their experiences. They are very normal people, just like you and me.

The perception that because the HIV/AIDS infect people through sex, our people have continued to regard anybody with the disease as somebody who must have had loose morals. This perception is what is responsible for denial of our HIV status. We therefore discriminate, stigmatize and ostracize anybody with AIDS. We refuse to accept them in our small world. We go out of our way to avoid them, gossip about their health and morals, literally poisoning the work place against them so that they feel unwanted, uncomfortable, unwelcome and unworthy. The terrible thing about the HIV/AIDS is that it makes the healthy members of our society turn against the sick. We must stop this discrimination and stigmatization.

Yes, this workshop is intended to make you stop that behaviour. This workshop is meant to make you regard HIV/AIDS as an incurable disease yes, but that if it is well managed, the sufferers can live a normal life. Those who are positive should not just take drugs whose costs are now so much affordable. They must eat well, eat good food, stop pitying themselves and live positively. It has been proved beyond any reasonable doubt that

HIV/AIDS patients who have accepted their status cope much better with life's challenges than those who are still committed to denying that they are positive.

This is the strong message I want to leave you with today. We owe it to our neighbours, our friends, our relatives and our workmates who are HIV positive. We must take care of them. If they are positive let us welcome them into our world. This welcome alone will make them ease their burdens. Let us be kind. Let us give HIV/AIDS sufferers hope. Let us visit them at home, in hospitals and everywhere. Let us invite them for parties and eat with them. Let us talk, crack jokes and laugh with them. Let us share with them our life experiences. If they are ignorant of some information that could make them live a normal life, let us help them access such information.

All said and done, the biggest problem the HIV/AIDS has caused to our society is the problem of orphans. Homes are being closed or deserted in our communities as fathers and mothers are buried leaving their children to take over from them at a very tender age. Who is going to take care of these children in terms of their up-keep, clothing, food, education and social upbringing? The family is the most important unit of our society, the only human institution created by God. What will happen to these children who are destined to grow up without the usual parental love and care? The traditional society which used to take care of orphans has fallen apart.

But in Parliament we can do something. We can raise money to pay school fees for some of these children, can't we? We just need to be organized,

don't we? The result of our inaction will be increased insecurity, immorality and callousness never before seen in human history.

This workshop is therefore not so much about HIV/AIDS awareness campaign as it is about influencing behaviour and accepting the social, economic and physical reality of HIV/AIDS and the new advances made recently in its treatment.

Thank you!