ADDRESS BY
HON. SOPHIA SHANINGWA, MP
MINISTER OF URBAN AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

COMMENORATION OF THE 2017 WORLD AIDS DAY

GOVERNMENT OFFICE PARK AUDITORIUM,
WINDHOEK
08 DECEMBER 2017
Director of Ceremonies

The Permanent Secretary, Management and staff of the Ministry

Representatives from Welwitchia University

Members of the Paulus Gowaseb Youth Choir

Distinguished quests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Members of the media

Good morning to you all. I bring warm greetings from our Minister who very much wanted to be here with us but is not able to do so due to other pressing commitments elsewhere.

Director of proceedings, ladies and gentlemen

We are here to show our solidarity with the rest of our fellow women and men in the country and the world in observing the World Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) Day, which is commemorated on the 1st of December each year. This day as we all know by now is dedicated to remembering both the millions of lives of loved one that are lost due to HIV/AIDS pandemic as well as celebrating the millions of that have been saved from the same virus.

This year’s event is being commemorated under the theme; "Right to Health".

Director of proceedings

Ladies and gentlemen
The World's AIDS Day presents an opportunity for us and the entire mankind to not only remember our fellow country men and women, brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers and colleagues who have fallen and are no longer with us due to the HIV virus, but it also for us to pause, reflect and take stock of our journey and response to this HIV/AIDS challenge thus far.

In keeping with the theme of this year's event, I wish to reflect on the journey and efforts that we, in Namibia and other parts of world, have travelled and have made in our fight against the HIV/AIDS.

- When the first case of HIV was made known to the world by medical scientists in the early 1980s, AIDS was an incurable and untreatable disease.
- Today 36 years later, thanks to medical and scientific breakthroughs, HIV/AIDS is now a chronic disease with lifelong treatment, not much different from other chronic Disease such as diabetes or high blood pressure.

- Today, with proper medicine and societal care, the life expectancy of a person living with HIV is no longer different from any other person in the community. As a matter of fact, in many parts of the world including Namibia, HIV has been replaced by lower respiratory infection as a leading cause of death National.

- The Government of Namibia is providing Anti-retrovirals (ARVs) to those who are HIV positive, and this is a standing commitment of the Government;

- More than 95% of babies born to HIV positive mothers remain negative;
Statistics from the Ministry of Health and Social Services indicate that Namibia is very close to achieving the targets of the 189 000 people that must be tested and know their status.

These are reasons for celebration!

Buts as we do so, we also must recognise that the battle is still on and we need to do more. The fight against the AIDS pandemic requires collective action and the contribution of each and every one of us.

Statistics show that of the people being tested for HIV, men are in the minority. So men are encouraged to play that part more vigorously in this regard.

HIV and AIDS is one of the biggest challenges we face as a country. Although HIV has become very common it is still surrounded by silence. People are ashamed to speak about being infected and many see it as a scandal when it happens to them or to their families. People living with HIV are exposed to daily prejudice born out of ignorance and fear. Individuals, families and communities are badly affected by the epidemic. The burden of care falls on the families and children of those who are ill. Often they have already lost a breadwinner and the meagre resources they have left are not enough to provide care for the ill person and food for the family.

People still feel that HIV/AIDS is something that happens to others and not to their families. People who are infected fear rejection and discrimination from those around them and try to hide their illness. Although testing is available, some people are not utilizing the services, which provided free at Government Health facilities across the country.

Ladies and gentlemen
The fight against HIV will be more effective if it is fought on two main fronts: prevention and care.

To prevent the spread of HIV, we have to know and practise extremely safe sex. We also have to change the social attitudes that make women vulnerable because they cannot refuse unsafe sex from a partner and the attitudes among men that lead to woman abuse and rape. Wellness Workplace Programme such as information dissemination, education and voluntary counselling and Testing (VCT) are also important programmes that will contribute to the prevention of HIV.

As parents, community leaders and professional service providers, staff members fulfil many different roles in their work and personal lives and often underestimate the impact of their work on their families, colleagues and wider community.

In this regard, employers such as the Government, have designed Workplace Wellness Programme with the aim of among others educating their employees to be both knowledgeable on the issue of HIV/AIDS and wellbeing as well as to be able to communicate and discuss aspects of sexual health and wellbeing with fellow staff members, their families and the community.

While the Government is obviously leading the way in the fight against HIV/AIDS, individually, we have an important role to play. Among others we are cautioned avoid unsafe sex, heavy drinking and smoking, which are known to suppress your immune system. There are lot of lectures on these and other methods of prevention and care, which are widely available and can be obtained even through our Ministry’s Wellness Unit.

In conclusion, I wish to thank the Permanent and the Wellness Team for organising this event and everyone in attendance for your commitment to the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic.
As the end is drawing to an end, let me take this opportunity to thank all the staff members of the Ministry for the hard work during the year and wish us all a restful and joyous festive season. Please take very good care of yourselves and your beloved ones. God bless, and I thank you.