

**Welcome Address by the Executive Mayor at the  
Candlelight Memorial Event in Bultfontein, 20 May 2007**

*Honourable MEC for Health Mr. S Belot*

*Mayors*

*Speakers present*

*Councillors*

*Officials*

*Ambassadors*

*Ladies and Gentlemen*

This is a sad day when we remember our brothers and sisters who fell due to this disease. This is a matter that so deeply affects our country, Africa and indeed the whole world.

HIV/AIDS has been with us for many years, but it remains a problem whose solution continues to elude us all. We are making some progress in understanding this challenge, but we still have a long way to go in containing its spread.

Although people from all walks of life are affected, AIDS is hitting hard at the most vulnerable sections of our society. It is the poor, the illiterate, the marginalised, the women and the children who bear most of the burden of the HIV epidemic.

I think today's theme 'leading the way to a world without AIDS' is indicative of the seriousness of this pandemic. The challenge of HIV/AIDS has become more complex over the past. We are no longer only dealing with information and awareness, but with people that are faced with the reality of living with the disease. The vast majority of them are undiagnosed. They do not know their HIV status. Some of them are already falling ill but they do

not know that their illnesses are related to HIV/AIDS. And even if they do know or suspect, they are reluctant to come out and talk about their condition

It is now high time to cross the fear barrier line and begin to know our status so as to preserve our lives. Honourable MEC, I am inviting all our communities to go and test to know their

status. As a district, we will be having an awareness campaign in Tokologo Municipality specifically in Hertzogville on Wednesday where we will be preaching our theme of “*know your status*”

I know some churches have always played a role of caring for those who are weak and in need of support. The care that you have given has not been limited only to the message of hope and spiritual well-being. But you have been able to initiate programmes that really make a difference in the lives of those in need of care particularly the children. I am convinced that the church can play a major role in fighting the stigma that is associated with HIV/AIDS and encourage openness and positive living amongst those who are infected and affected. Please continue the good work and God bless you.

The treatments of HIV/AIDS will not be successfully delivered unless mobilisation of communities occurs. This mobilisation is necessary to overcome the stigma and discrimination that blocks people seeking ARVs and treatment, and to ensure even a basic understanding of the treatments and the right to them. The community is also the major source of day to day support for treatment delivery with issues as basic as ensuring people are able to take the medicines effectively.

But life-saving treatment never reaches people who do not know they're infected. I therefore urge all members of the communities to join us in support of this initiative. Know your status.

In those words I welcome everyone who has graced this occasion.

Thank you for your commitment to defeating this pandemic. The government looks forward to working with you, and to finally winning the fight against AIDS.