

Speech

Check against delivery

SADC/NAP+: People Living with HIV Advocacy Conference

Gaberone, 18 March 2008

**Speech by
Elizabeth Mataka
UN SG Special Envoy on AIDS in Africa**

Thank you your Excellency, Honourable Mogae.;

Thank you honoured guests;

Ladies and gentlemen.

It is an honour and a pleasure to be here with you today, and I thank you very much for giving me this opportunity. It is right that people living with, and affected by, HIV are at the heart of our efforts to respond to AIDS.

All of us gathered here know only too well that Southern Africa is the epicenter of the global AIDS epidemic. In 2007 our sub-region accounted for 35% of all of the world's people living with HIV and almost a third of all new HIV infections and AIDS deaths.

This epidemic has made an overwhelming, indelible impact on our countries and communities, an impact that each one of us in this room can attest to. The number of people newly infected each day is difficult to comprehend as are the numbers of AIDS related deaths which have changed the way we organize our lives and how we organize our families and care for our young.

Although we should not cease our efforts to ensure the world appreciates the magnitude of this epidemic it should not be seen just in terms of numbers of infections and deaths - it is also evident in the vibrancy and energy of the response to AIDS and the mobilization of people living with HIV and communities in response to the many challenges of this pandemic.

This year, we can see emerging, the first real signs of evidence that our efforts are starting to have a positive impact in preventing more infections and ensuring people living with HIV lead longer, healthy and productive lives. We actually need not look further than here, Botswana: with the achievement of universal access to anti-retroviral therapies. That is real progress. Look around and you will see evidence of this progress. Many of us gathered here today are a testament of this progress.

However, much more needs to be done. And each one of us in this room has a crucial role to play in addressing this epidemic. At this stage of the response to AIDS we must guard against any sense of complacency setting in - we are still a long way from having the appropriate systems, leadership and resources on the ground needed to secure universal access to prevention, care and treatment.

We are still a long way from saying, with assurance, that people living with HIV are meaningfully involved and engaged in their national responses. The fact is that AIDS is going to be with us for generations to come, but nothing will change, and the SADC countries will not even come close to attaining universal access to treatment, care and support, if the participation of people living with HIV remains tokenistic and without strategic direction.

We must all do more to support the greater meaningful engagement and leadership of people living with HIV. This conference promises much in that respect. We need practical solutions and strong ownership within the positive networks to ensure that positive people are shaping our national responses and are not simply recipients of services.

My role today is to propose ways that I, as the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy on AIDS in Africa, can support you in the execution of the advocacy framework on the challenges facing people living with HIV and AIDS in our region.

I come here wearing two hats. One as the Special Envoy; the other as the Vice Chair of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria. And it is wearing these two hats that I shall share with you the ways in which I hope to support you in these endeavours:

As I mentioned before, universal access will not be attained unless people living with HIV are meaningfully involved in the AIDS response. One of the most pertinent partnerships in the AIDS response has been with civil society. If we look back to the beginning of the AIDS 'movement' it was activists, civil society essentially, that spearheaded and mobilized support and attention for the response.

Therefore, as Special Envoy, I have made it my priority to ensure that civil society, particularly people living with HIV, are appropriately engaged in their national responses and working hand in hand with national AIDS authorities on their national strategic and operational plans. It is imperative that civil society claims ownership of these important processes and the outcomes of these plans. And the engagement of people living with HIV should not stop at the national level, it must continue into the decision making processes at the regional and international level through regional bodies and partners like SADC and the AU. For this to happen, the relationship between civil society and governments as well as civil society and regional and continental bodies needs constant investment and strengthening.

I have been in civil society for the last 25 years in Zambia and now I head up the Zambia National AIDS Network; therefore as Special Envoy, I believe that I am in a good position to act as a bridge, a broker of sorts, between you and these governance bodies – I understand the issues, the frustration, the constraints and the needs, having spearheaded many lengthy strategic planning processes and donor negotiations. Sometimes it can feel that we are like a broken record as we constantly talk about the need to build our capacity, improve issues of representation, reduce territoriality, build accountability, invest in new leaders and secure longer term core funding to keep our organizations alive and thriving. But we must not give up. These challenges will remain with us for some time yet but we are constantly learning and making progress.

So let me advocate that you see me as another advocacy tool at your disposal to help address these issues. I can take our concerns, yes ours, to the highest levels of governance.

As vice-chair of the Global Fund, I recognize that networks of people living with HIV are not primary recipients of Global Fund money. I am aware that the reason so often cited is that networks do not have the necessary capacity to manage and administer these funds.

At the Global Fund we are encouraging proposals to include community systems strengthening and promoting the strengthening of the institutional and organizational development of the networks through these community systems strengthening strategies, with the view that in the near future, once their capacity has been built, networks of people living with HIV will be primary recipients.

As I said earlier I still strongly identify as belonging to African civil society and as a result I feel that I am in unique position to ask a question of you, my civil society colleagues. My

question is this: how can we improve on the quality of the services that we provide? As we ponder this question, I kindly ask that we first ask ourselves: what exactly *are* the services that we provide? How do we add value?

Let us take, for example, the recent country progress reports submitted to the UN General Assembly. Where are the shadow reports traditionally produced by civil society? Only two countries in sub-Saharan African have civil society reports submitted for consideration alongside the national reports. What level of involvement have we had in the development of these country progress reports? Are they really offering a true picture of progress or can our monitoring and evaluation systems be further improved to ensure that we better understand the realities of AIDS? How can I, Special Envoy, ensure that the country progress reports submitted to the UN General Assembly include the best national data? Your meaningful engagement in the consultation process and further analysis, debate and scrutiny of the country reports, is a vital service that you can provide that will ensure that the reporting on national responses is more accurate.

This is just one example of how we are necessary and relevant to our AIDS responses. And so, as we reflect on my initial question, I would like us to underpin that reflection with the knowledge that our role in this response is the most vital one.

Let me close by saying that this is an important occasion for the AIDS response, and for us the citizens of the SADC region.

I look forward to hearing about reinvigorated positive leadership at the end of this conference and I wish you fruitful deliberations.

Thank you.