



**Address by the Sedibeng District Municipality Executive Mayor,
Cllr Mahole Simon Mofokeng on the occasion of the Sedibeng
AIDS Council Meeting, Sedibeng Mayor's Parlour, on the
1st April 2011 in Sedibeng**

Programme Director

Our Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is once again my pleasure to be with you today. I bring you greetings from Sedibeng District Municipality. We are meeting here today hardly a day after a very successful hosting of the Human Rights Month in our District and the 51st Anniversary of the Sharpeville Massacre, which unlike the one held last year was without the tensions from our communities.

This year's Commemoration was marked by reporting back to our communities on progress made on the commitments we made last year.

Brothers and Sisters, today I speak with increased hope because Sedibeng District, as a region has demonstrated that through collective energy and partnership, we can defeat HIV&AIDS. This has been illustrated by the statistically significant reduction of HIV-prevalence from 35% in 2006 to 28.9%.

The battle against HIV&AIDS has to be won, and therefore will be fought tenaciously at all fronts that employ affordable, effective and sustainable strategies; including joining hands like we did when we defeated apartheid. Then we were united in ushering peace and democracy, free and fair elections and we ended political disproportion that ravaged our country.

In this regard prevention remains our vanguard, while we continue to work tirelessly to encourage and enroll people to Antiretroviral Therapy. HIV&AIDS communication programmes need to be transformed from being behavioural change driven to supporting real interventions on the ground.

They need to make a difference in the lives of people, including those living with HIV. The challenge for communication programme is to move beyond simple messaging and provide effective links to service delivery. Although access to HCT services has being improved, we are yet to see statistically increased number of people utilising these services.

We are to reach 312 000 people who test for HIV by June 2011. Young men are encouraged to undergo medical circumcision, which, although proven to reduce the risk of HIV-infection; is not *per se* a contraceptive i.e. consistent condom use is imperative and a rule.

The implementation of the prevention of mother to child transmission (PMTCT) programmes has been encouraging; with the recent survey showing that around 90% of babies born to HIV-positive mothers are negative, thanks to the programme and the efforts put by our health professionals.

With more and more sites being accredited for the rollout of treatment for HIV&AIDS, more people have an opportunity to get free, life-saving treatment. It is in all our interests.

The effect of the HIV/TB epidemics can be seen in our District mortality statistics and in estimates of life-expectancy. We cannot stand back when a disease that is curable is stealing the lives of men, women and children.

We cannot waste time when this illness is spreading among our people. We have the power to cure TB, to bring people back to good health. All it takes is six months of taking the treatment correctly on a daily basis.

Let us encourage people who are on TB treatment to take their tablets correctly and complete their treatment even when they feel better. Let us all work together to put our district on the path to better health.

We need to get the youth and parents to engage in a frank dialogue in confronting the problem of teenage pregnancies, drug and alcohol abuse in our district, which are on the increase and are contributing to the spread on HIV-infections and other STIs. Parents must be taught how to identify the signs of drug and alcohol abuse.

Government regards business as an important partner. Workplace programs are now moving beyond awareness; and implement broader wellness activities that include treatment care and support. These need to be linked to community services. We also think that business has a responsibility to contribute towards the general well being of the workers and their communities.

We are glad to see that business has begun to understand this role, especially in the context of the HIV&AIDS pandemic. They have understood the socio-economic impact of HIV&AIDS in terms of lost skills, absenteeism, low morale and low productivity; and they are putting in place workplace treatment programmes.

In a world characterised by unequal power relations between men and women; men should assist in the fight against violence and their voice should be loud and clear on these matters. Violence against woman and children; and substance abuse contribute to the spread of HIV and AIDS.

Younger people should delay their sexual debut and abstain. And when people do become sexually active, they should use condoms consistently. We should all avoid multiple and concurrent sexual partners. Let us commit to being faithful by sticking to one sexual relationship.

As the District we must all be proud of the gains this democracy has brought and can bring to future generations; at the same time being prudent of the socio-economic impacts HIV&AIDS can bring to us. The only way is to be united in purpose to stop this scourge.

For our district to succeed in preventing the spread of HIV, it is vital that each and every one of us recognises that sexual behaviour is our individual responsibility. Let us ensure that all civil society structures not only participate in these forums but also implement effective and efficient programmes to the communities to enable victory!!

Today, our presence in this room signals our pledge to continue to work together to turn the tide against this pandemic. Our children's plight dictates that we participate in this forum, ensure smooth and effective implementation of the HIV&AIDS programme within the district and ensure stakeholders' participation to ensure HIV-free generations to come.

Remember, we didn't inherit the world from our forefathers; rather we borrow it from our children.

I am happy to be one of the good news bearers that President Jacob Zuma declared 18 May 2011, the Election Day as a public holiday throughout the Republic. The declaration would enable voters to participate in the local government elections on the day. I hope and trust that we are all ready to make our mark.

I therefore expect to see you all at the voting station throughout our District on the 18th May 2011.

I thank you!