

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
BY THE
HON. MINISTER OF HEALTH, DR CHILUFYA,
ON THE
NATIONAL STATUS AND RESPONSE TO HIV/AIDS IN ZAMBIA

Mr Speaker, I thank you for granting me this opportunity to deliver a ministerial statement on the state of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) epidemic and our national response.

Mr Speaker, allow me to preface my statement by thanking His Excellency the President, Mr Edgar Chagwa Lungu for providing adequate guidelines to this nation in his Presidential Address on 17th March, 2017.

Mr Speaker, HIV/AIDS remains to be a matter of public health. From the time HIV/AIDS broke out in this country, it has placed a heavy burden on the country's national resources.

Mr Speaker, while tremendous progress has been scored in the fight against HIV/AIDS, a lot remains to be done. HIV/AIDS, according to the prevalence survey done in 2016, called the Zambia Population-based HIV Impact Assessment (ZAMPHIA), has reduced from 13.3 per cent in adults aged between fifteen and forty-nine years to 11.6 per cent. By the end of 2016, there were 1.2 million Zambians living with HIV/AIDS.

Mr Speaker, the incidence has declined. In 2005, we recorded 77,500 cases and in 2016, we only recorded 46,000 cases. This reduction is significant but a lot more needs to be done.

Mr Speaker, HIV/AIDS is preventable and can be eliminated. This is a sermon to all of us. We have a set of actions that can move us towards control and elimination of HIV/AIDS. We need to harness our national potential through forging strong partnerships with the communities, churches, civil societies, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and National Guidance, the Ministry

of Community Development and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Higher Education and indeed, all stakeholders.

Mr Speaker, I reiterate that we need to commit to a set of collective actions in order to attain virtual control and elimination of HIV/AIDS epidemic. Within three years, if Zambia is committed to this set of intentions, we can attain this goal and by the year, 2030, we will be able to eliminate HIV/AIDS. Therefore, the Patriotic Front (PF) Government, under His Excellency, Mr Edgar Chagwa Lungu has come up with policies that will drive this agenda.

Mr Speaker, HIV/AIDS can be prevented and I will highlight a number of interventions that we need to commit to and those that we have passed as a policy in order to move towards epidemic control.

HIV Counselling and Testing

The first step in the prevention, treatment, care and support of HIV infections is to ensure that we all know our status. It is important that counselling and testing of individuals for the HIV virus is escalated. While we acknowledge an increase in the numbers of people that have tested for HIV from 2007, where we only had 19 per cent of women and 12 per cent of men tested to 2016 where more than 60 per cent did, there is need to do a lot more.

Mr Speaker, HIV counselling and testing is the first step. The Government has now made a policy change in the way it manages HIV/AIDS from this angle. All who are tested positive are now eligible for Anti-retroviral Therapy (ART) regardless of the CD4 count or, indeed, any other parameters. So, test and treat is now the new policy in the management of HIV/AIDS.

Mr Speaker, if you look at the statistics, you recognise that children aged between fourteen and eighteen are vulnerable to HIV. The face of HIV today is the youth, the adolescent and the young adult between 15 and 25 years. There is need for us to improve adolescent and reproductive health services. We will then strengthen our school health programmes; forge partnerships with the church and start work-place policy programmes where we will do self testing. We have

extended ART treatment clinics in all our facilities to work even over weekends just to ensure that all those who test and are found positive are started on ART immediately.

Mr Speaker, while I focussed a lot on treatment as part of prevention, I want to emphasise that behavioural change remains the mainstay. Comprehensive condom programming is important and the ministry is working with stakeholders to encourage condom use to prevent transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases from one partner to another. Comprehensive condom programming is one of the high impact interventions that we have put in place.

Mr Speaker, voluntary medical male circumcision is yet another intervention that we have put in place. We have seen numbers increase, but we need to sensitise the public that male circumcision reduces the chances of contracting HIV/AIDS by 60 per cent. We are escalating the male circumcision programme.

Mr Speaker, in 2016, 200,000 males were circumcised and this based the Target of 72,000. We need to see more in this year.

Anti-Retroviral Therapy (ART)

Mr Speaker, in response to the Universal Health Coverage Declaration on the provision of equity and access to health services to all Zambians, we have made a bold and courageous decision to provide free ARVs for all eligible patients.

Mr Speaker, anti-retroviral therapy is the most efficacious dual method for treating patients living with HIV and further preventing new infections. When we put patients on ART, we reduce the viral load and when this is done, chances of transmission to the next patient are reduced.

Mr Speaker, I want to reiterate that with 1.2 million people living with HIV/AIDS, one of the most efficacious interventions that we have put in place is to treat everybody. Mr Speaker, 850,000 people today are on ART and the Government targets to put the other 350,000 on treatment this year.

Mr Speaker, the Government has made adequate provisions for ARVs and with support from the Global Fund and the U.S President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR), we have adequate ARVs in the country and our projections show that we will be able to treat the remaining 350,000 out of the 1.2 million living with HIV/AIDS.

Mr Speaker, the coverage of EMTCT varies from province to province. The highest coverage has been in Central Province which has recorded 100 per cent while Northern Province has recorded 60 per cent. Eastern, Southern, Muchinga and Western Provinces have recorded below 60 per cent.

Mr Speaker, in conclusion, allow me to emphasise that HIV is preventable and that we can eliminate it on our watch if we all commit to certain actions such as testing and treating. We all need to ensure we prevent transmission of HIV to the next person through behavioural change; condom programming and committing to all interventions that the Ministry of Health has put in place to reduce or minimise the chances of transmission, including male circumcision. Mr Speaker, test and treat will only work if the church, various work places and ministries all commit to these set of actions.

Mr Speaker, the Patriotic Front (PF) Government is committed to the elimination of HIV/AIDS and working with all stakeholders to ensure that by 2020, we attain epidemic control and ensure that HIV is eliminated from Zambia by the year 2030.

Mr Speaker, I thank you.