

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

ON

INTRODUCTION OF TENOFOVIR ALAFENAMIDE

BY

THE HON. MINISTER OF HEALTH, DR CHILUFYA, MP

Madam Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity to update the nation, through this august House on the introduction of a new Antiretroviral (ARV) drug in the country called Tenofovir Alafenamide (TAF) for the treatment of Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome(HIV/AIDS) in Zambia.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Health implements a five year National Health Strategic Plan based on the World Health Organisation (WHO) six core components for building blocks of a health system. This means focusing on delivery of quality health services, human capital development, robust health information management system, healthcare financing and access to essential medicines, leadership and governance, which speak to universal access to essential medicines. Today, I will confine myself to access to a new anti-HIV drug called TAF.

Madam Speaker, the Universal Health Coverage Agenda, to which His Excellency the President of this country, Mr Edgar Chagwa Lungu, has made a political commitment, is top of the global health policy and it is a smart investment. This will lead to having a healthy and productive population and will culminate into a prosperous middle income country by 2030.

Madam, currently, there are 1,224,017 people living with HIV in Zambia. Out of these, the Government has managed to enrol 1,094,253 individuals on Antiretroviral Treatment (ART), translating to 89 per cent.

Madam Speaker, 89 per cent of these people know their HIV status. Out of these, 91 per cent are taking life saving ARVs and among these, 89 per cent have attained viral load suppression. This is a demonstration that Zambia is on track to attain epidemic control of HIV/AIDS. Through the

HIV National Programme, Zambia has now introduced a new drug that is better tolerated and this drug is known as TAF.

Madam Speaker, this drug has many advantages and key is the fact that it will reduce the viral load within ten to fourteen days, compared to other ARVs which would take six months and beyond. On 27th June, 2019, we had begun enrolling Zambian patients on this new drug. Zambia is the first country in the developing world to use this medicine. In addition to this, we are introducing another drug which is a combination of TAF and Emtricitabine and Dolutegravir which is called TAFED. This drug has the following advantages:

- (a) it does not cause kidney injury, as is the case with many other drugs;
- (b) it does not lead to bone mineral loss;
- (c) it is available in combination with other drugs;
- (d) it reduces the viral load, like I said, within ten to fourteen days;
- (e) the Dolutegravir component is less likely to lead to the development of drug resistance; and
- (f) TAFED, in addition to being given to adults can be given to children with the weight of 25 kg or more. Therefore, children can also have the benefit of having one tablet once per day for HIV treatment.

Madam, the fact that TAFED will also be given to children who weight above 25 kg means that there will be harmonisation of the ARV regimen in children and adults as well as better outcomes.

Madam Speaker, now that all HIV infected patients are initiated on ART as soon as their status is confirmed, we are seeing fewer new infections. I would, therefore, like to use this opportunity to

discredit the report that came out in *The Daily Mail* of the United Kingdom (UK) that talked about Zambia being a land of orphans because of HIV/AIDS. Zambia today, has embarked on a very successful HIV programme which has resulted in reduced new infections, mortality and mobility and HIV is now a chronic, but manageable condition.

Madam Speaker, may I assure the nation that we have adequate stocks of ARVs in the country and we have commodity security of up to three years. All people who test positive to HIV are given ARV drugs free of charge which are commenced on the same day. Once started on ARV drugs, the patients will attain viral load suppression within ten to fourteen days and he will not transmit the virus to the next person or to the next client or to their child in the case of a mother. This is, therefore, an opportunity for Zambia to firmly attain epidemic control of HIV/AIDS.

Madam, I appeal to the hon. Members of Parliament to sensitise their constituents to ensure that they all test for HIV/AIDS. Those who are positive should enrol on ART as HIV is no longer a death sentence.

Madam Speaker, I thank you.