

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

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PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

ON

**THE OCCASION OF THE CERTIFICATION CEREMONY FOR NAMIBIA'S
PATH TO ELIMINATION OF MOTHER-TO-CHILD TRANSMISSION OF HIV
AND HEPATITIS B VIRUS.**

Monday, 06 May 2024

Mercure Hotel

Windhoek

*Check against Delivery

- **Director of Proceeding, Mr. Ben Nangombe, Executive Director of the Ministry of Health and Social Services of Namibia;**
- **Honourable Dr. Kalumbi Shangula, Minister of Health and Social Services of Namibia;**
- **Honourable Ministers and Deputy Ministers;**
- **Heads of UN Agencies;**
- **Assistant Director General of WHO;**
- **WHO Regional Director for Africa;**
- **WHO Directors from Headquarters and African Region;**
- **WHO Representatives;**
- **Permanent Secretaries and Executive Directors;**
- **Senior Government Officials;**
- **Development Cooperation Partners;**
- **Distinguished Invited Guests;**
- **Members of the Media;**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

1. Good morning once more. I stand before you with immense gratitude and humility as we celebrate a monumental achievement for Namibia's public health care system, specifically with respect to our national HIV/AIDS response. It is with great honour that I, on behalf of our President Dr. Nangolo Mbumba, receive this prestigious recognition from the World Health Organization, marking Namibia's achievement of the Silver Tier on

the Path to Elimination of Mother-to-Child Transmission of the Hepatitis B Virus (HBV); and the Bronze Tier on the Path to Elimination of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV/AIDS. This recognition is an important milestone in Namibia's march towards ending HIV/AIDS as a public health threat.

2. We are indeed encouraged by the fact that Namibia is the first country in the world to be assessed and recognized to be on the Path-to-Elimination of Mother-to-Child Transmission of the Hepatitis B Virus and also that we are the second country in Africa to be recognized to be on the path to elimination of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV/AIDS, following in the footpath of our neighbor, the Republic of Botswana.
3. This recognition does not only speak to the important work this is done by the Government of the Republic of Namibia in this subsector of public health and the healthcare professionals who have dedicated their lives to this cause, but it is also a testament to the resilience, the unity, and unwavering commitment of the Namibian people as a whole and the immense support that we have received from our development cooperation partners over the years.
4. It is a testament to the strength of the countless mothers, fathers, and children who have been impacted by these diseases and who have stood with fortitude in the fight for a healthier future.

Director of Ceremony,

5. The Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission (PMTCT) and immunization programmes in Namibia are fully integrated into the maternal and child health service delivery settings at health facilities and community levels. Over the years, the country has made significant strides in improving the PMTCT indicators. PMTCT services were rolled out to 99% of all health public facilities by 2019.

6. Namibia has been implementing evidence-based interventions in line with international and national standards, including recommendations from the World Health Organization through development of operational guidelines; training of health workers; recruitment of key staff; capacity building of laboratory services; support for community-based interventions; development of health infrastructure; as well as procurement of equipment, ARVs, vaccines and clinical supplies.

7. In 2020, Namibia launched the National Roadmap for the Elimination of Mother-To-Child Transmission of HIV and Congenital Syphilis (2020-2024). The plan set the goal and milestones for the country to be certified as having achieved one of the tiers according to the targets of WHO's Path to Elimination (PTE). An addendum for the elimination of Hepatitis B Virus (HBV) was made in 2023. In addition, the National Roadmap outlined

strategies and activities to ensure the provision of quality PMTCT services, laboratory services, data collection, as well as greater and meaningful engagement with networks of civil society groups and beneficiaries of these programmes and interventions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. The work done by the Ministry of Health and Social Services and the National Validation Committee (NVC), in collaboration with the WHO-led Regional and Global Validation Committees to assess our HIV and Hepatitis B Virus (HBV) programmes for the years 2020, 2021 and 2022 showed that almost all pregnant women in the country attend at least one ANC visit and over 90% deliver in health facilities. HIV testing among pregnant women was 99.9% in 2020, 99.5% in 2021 and 99.7% in 2022. Antiretroviral therapy (ART) coverage among HIV positive pregnant women stood at 98% in 2020, 2021 and 2022. More than 98% of babies born to HIV positive mothers are born HIV negative.

9. Namibia offers Hepatitis B virus testing to all pregnant women receiving ANC services. Testing for Hepatitis B virus amongst pregnant women was 89% in 2020, 92% in 2021 and 93% 2022. Coverage of Hepatitis B vaccine birth dose was 86% in 2020, 83% in 2021 and 94% in 2022. The coverage

of Hepatitis B vaccine third dose among children was 93% in 2020, 94% in 2021 and 84% in 2022.

Ladies and gentlemen,

10. Our success in achieving these goals is the result of a comprehensive and holistic approach to healthcare. It is the result of investing in prevention, testing, treatment, and support services for mothers and their newborns. It is the result of investing in the laboratory services. It is the result of prioritizing education, awareness, and community engagement to break down stigma and discrimination as well as respecting human rights. It is the result of efforts towards building robust monitoring and evaluation systems. And it is the result of forging partnerships and collaborations with development and implementing partners, who have been invaluable allies in our shared mission.

11. Eliminating mother-to-child transmission of HIV and HBV is not just a public health goal; it is a moral imperative. Every child born free from these diseases represents a triumph of compassion over adversity, of hope over despair. It represents the fulfillment of our promise to future generations—a promise of a world where every child has the opportunity to thrive, regardless of the circumstances of their birth. A step towards ensuring an HIV free generation.

12. But while we celebrate these milestones today, we must also recognize that our work is far from over. The fight against HIV and HBV is ongoing, and there are still many challenges that lie ahead. We must remain resolute in our efforts to expand access to healthcare services, particularly in rural areas and underserved communities. We must continue to invest in research and innovation to develop new and more effective treatments. And we must redouble our efforts to address the underlying social and economic determinants of health that perpetuate health disparities and inequalities.
13. As we look to the future, let us draw inspiration from the progress we have made and let it fuel our determination to do even more. Let us commit ourselves anew to the cause of health equity and justice for all. And let us never forget that the true measure of our success lies not in the awards we receive, but in the lives we touch and the difference we make in the world.
14. At this particular moment, let me once again thank the World Health Organization for this honor, and thank you the people of Namibia for your courage, your resilience and your unwavering commitment to building a healthier, brighter future for all.

Furthermore, I would like to thank our development and implementing partners for technical and financial support. Together, we have the power to shape a future where every child is born free from the burden of HIV and HBV a future where health equity is not just a dream but a reality for all.

I thank you.