



**Leadership and Social Mobilisation on HIV/AIDS in  
Africa**

*Address by Mrs. Graça Machel at the ADF 2000*

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Excellencies, my dear youth delegates, ladies and gentlemen, respected colleagues: Good morning to all of you.

I am delighted to be here and able to join you in the important work of developing clear and implement able ways of dealing with the HIV/AIDS crisis that is having such devastating impacts on our continent.

I didn't come here to make an academic speech, filled with the horrifying statistics that accompany HIV/AIDS. You have already heard the terrible numbers and projections in the course of the last two days. You already live – every day - with HIV/AIDS and the destruction of lives, the erosion of our families, communities, and nations that come with the virus.

I want to talk to you, and especially to the young people here today, from my heart. My theme is leadership and social mobilisation. And let us start by remembering three sobering facts:

- 1) There is still no cure for HIV/AIDS
- 2) There is still no vaccine for the virus
- 3) Although medication now exists which enables people living with HIV to live longer with the virus, these treatments are still very expensive, which leaves them out of the reach of the vast majority of people on this continent who need them.

Add these facts to the statistics that we have been given and it is only too easy to give in to feelings of powerlessness. But as devastating and as overwhelming as the spread of this deadly virus is; and despite its profound impact on our lives, it is my firm belief that not even HIV/AIDS can defeat this great continent of ours. Because we do have some assets in this struggle: the first is that AIDS can be prevented and we know how it can be prevented. The other great assets are the people and communities of Africa, complete with our strength, determination and proven ability to survive. But to turn the tide in the struggle against AIDS each one of us here and elsewhere on the continent, must assume the individual and collective responsibility to act, and to act now.

This is a conference on HIV/AIDS and leadership. It is a great credit to the conference organisers that we see so many different kinds of leaders gathered together here. And as leaders, each of you has important, if sometimes different roles to play. As a former Minister of Education, I want to start with the responsibility of governments.

It is a primary obligation of governments to protect its citizens. And what is the point or use of a government if it cannot or will not lead its people? Our governments in Africa must stop looking at all the obstacles holding them back from action and show the true leadership of some of our past great African leaders. Individually, we must demonstrate the qualities of courage, integrity and respect for others. Collectively our governments must recognise that leadership means abandoning rhetoric and taking action. They must energise our people and mobilise the necessary resources to conduct the campaign against HIV/AIDS. Lack of resources is not a sufficient excuse. When governments lead their

countries to war they can spend as much as 45% of the countries resources on that war. What percentages of national budgets are currently being spent to vanquish HIV/AIDS? Our governments must show the leadership to allocate greater proportions of our admittedly limited budgets, to ridding our continent of the threat of HIV/AIDS. If you can mobilise resources for war, why can't you mobilise resources for life?

As governments, we cannot allow resources to be an excuse to sit back and watch our people die. We must remember continually that each one of the statistics that we have heard has a name, has a family, is someone's daughter, son, sister, brother.

But governments cannot win this struggle on their own. So while governments must accept responsibility for mobilising financial resources, and developing national policy and practice frameworks, we must all fulfil our responsibilities and work together. That means that national plans to vanquish HIV/AIDS must permeate every corner of our nations – must reflect national action, district and local action. Every village, every town, every district, every sector should have clear plans and identified people as focal points. The national plans must permeate to the places where people work, where they live, where our values are made and challenged – in our families, our religious gatherings, our councils of traditional leaders, our parliamentary gatherings, our Mother's Unions.

My experiences during our armed conflicts and in the struggles to recover and rebuild Mozambique have given me a very clear understanding of the strength that lies in our African communities. It is essential that we mobilise that strength and recognise that we must use all of our human resources. It is still the case that we don't give enough prominence to the potential and the contribution of women and young people. My Foundation works with many community groups in Mozambique, and I have had the privilege of working with civil society groups throughout Africa and the world. How long will it take for us to recognise the importance of women and young people as engines for change? To defeat the spectre of HIV/AIDS, we must work together and use all our strengths – men and women, adults and children.

Here is one of the tragic facts of our times: life expectancy in almost every one of the countries on this continent is worse now than at any point in the past forty years. The lives of infants born today in many African countries will be 20 years shorter than the lives of their parents and grandparents. Parents will bury not only their children but their grandchildren as well. We are squandering our inheritance - even worse, we are throwing away our children's inheritance and wasting their futures.

Young people are key. They are the group that are being infected at the greatest rates. They are the key to prevention and often shoulder the greatest burden of care. They are the group that inherits this catastrophe. Yet we continue to marginalize them, not recognising their strengths and not building on their potential.

I want to say to all the youth delegates and young people attending this conference – thank you. Thank you for showing us your strength. Showing us your concern, your wisdom, your vision and your commitment. Your active and inspiring participation in

this conference has illustrated how we throw away so much of our strength as communities when we don't include you in our deliberations, planning and implementing of policy. As youth leaders, work with our political leaders, our religious leaders, and our civil society and community leaders. Sometimes, as adults, we fear the leadership of young people because of the challenges they present to us. But this is their present and their future that we are dealing with. As adults, we must have the common sense and the courage to open spaces for young people, to listen to them and to work with them.

And there are important challenges that they should make. We have many wonderful traditions that have strengthened our communities and helped us to survive many threats over the past centuries. But culture has never been static – communities survive and thrive because cultures are constantly adapting. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in this era of HIV/AIDS there are some of our traditions that young people must necessarily challenge and change if they and we, are to survive. I will give you three examples:

- 1) as parents we don't talk clearly and openly about sex and sexuality with our children. No matter how difficult or uncomfortable it is for us as adults, we must show our love for our children by learning to break that barrier and empower them with the information they need to protect themselves. And young people must learn to talk to each other openly about sexual issues, to negotiate and in doing so, to live.
- 2) In parts of the continent the traditional inheritance of wives continues – a dangerous practice in these times, particularly when this tradition is enforced in communities with high HIV/AIDS prevalence or in cases where it is known that the husband has died of AIDS.
- 3) Some of our communities continue to inculcate young men with notions of manhood that include encouraging them view having multiple partners as natural and normal. At the same time they are told that it is their right, if not their duty to carry on the family name and the family line by having as many children as possible. In this era of HIV/AIDS, different priorities must be developed and different values exemplified by our young men. Multiple partners not only endanger the young men themselves and their partners, it also endangers the lives of any children they might have. Instead of carrying on the family name, we are helping them to destroy it.

These are some of the areas in which our traditional leaders could show true leadership. As custodians of many of our traditions, they could develop and spread an understanding of the principles that lie behind our traditions, so that those principles might be maintained, while the unhelpful practices are eradicated. Our traditional leaders are among the people that help develop our values and they must be among the people that challenge and change those values when they undermine rather than strengthen our communities. They can use their influence to help us build new visions of what manhood means.

This is a crucial time for us. When historians write about HIV/AIDS, when they write about this period in time, they will ask – 'Where were the leaders of Africa? And where were the rest of the world?' If we do not want to stand condemned at that time, we must

act, we must work together and we must do it now. How we as Africans tackle the challenge of HIV/AIDS will send a message to the international community about what kind of leaders we are and about our style of leadership for the future. Our efforts to check the virus' spread must include compassion and care for those already living with HIV/AIDS. They must reflect the right of people living with HIV/AIDS to the best treatment available. So many of the people living with HIV/AIDS are young, with skills and knowledge to offer and the fundamental right to live as well as they can for as long as they can. How can we condemn them to earlier deaths than need be? Our actions must be fuelled by a deep respect for the rights of all of our people. Our leadership must recognise our obligations to ensure that people living with HIV/AIDS, as well as children and young people, have their voices heard and are fully involved in all elements of the planning and implementation of our work for development. All of these things will signal how Africa intends to fulfil its leadership responsibilities within the international community of nations. All will shape the way our future leaders will act in their own time.

Make no mistake, what we do about HIV/AIDS in Africa or what we don't do, will influence not only our own nations but relations among nations around the world for generations to come. We have heard clear commitments from the international community to support our efforts of overcome HIV/AIDS, but we must make the international community accountable for those promises and the ways in which they fulfil them. The truth of the matter is that over the past decades we have heard many promises from the international community to provide billions of dollars to assist the development efforts of Africa. Only too often those promises have not been kept, or the assistance has been given in ways that undermine rather than support us. The eradication of HIV/AIDS is a global issue and we do need the help of the international community, but we must pick our alliances as carefully as we should pick our leaders. The international community and all of its elements must consider their leadership roles in overcoming the threat that HIV/AIDS presents to international development and international peace and security. The qualities of integrity, respect, listening and commitment are as important for the international community and its leaders as they are for Africa and our leaders. But above all, we must remember that any international support is just that – support. They can only be additional to our own efforts and it will be our own efforts that bring us rewards in this struggle.

This conference is a huge opportunity. Let us use it to its full advantage and make sure that it does not become another 'talking shop', but that our people can look back and say that the ADF 2000 was a turning point in the struggle against AIDS in Africa. I plead with you – political leaders, religious leaders, civil society leaders, youth leaders, as well as the international financial institutions and donor countries and organisations gathered here – NO MORE FICTIONS. Do not fool Africa any more. Let us move forward.

At the opening session, my brother KY Amoako spoke very eloquently of the ADF being a process, not a single event. So let us build on whatever outcomes we produce at this meeting. Let us monitor closely all the action points we identify and the promises we make here. The Abuja initiative in April is an opportunity to measure progress from this

meeting. It will present an opportunity for the OAU and other of our regional and sub-regional institutions to show that HIV/AIDS is a serious priority for them and that they are taking clear, measurable action to vanquish HIV/AIDS on our continent. The United Nations Special Session on HIV/AIDS in June will be another chance to measure and demonstrate the progress that should have been made in the time between this meeting and that one. It will be a chance to challenge the international community to prove that it is serious about the battle against HIV/AIDS.

There is a further meeting that we should take advantage of. In September 2001, the UN is holding a Special Session on Children that will review the extent to which we as nations, internationally, have fulfilled the promises we made to children at the 1990 Social Summit. The Special Session will establish a new agenda for the next decade and elicit commitments from states as to how we will work to guarantee and deliver the rights of all our children to dignity, security and development. Madiba and I will be working with the states sponsoring the Special Session, with many national and international civil society groups and most importantly, with leaders of all kinds in creating healthy, prosperous and peaceful futures for children. I invite you to join us in this work – to encourage your respective governments, religious groups, and civil society groups to send high level representatives to the Special Session. To challenge yourselves as leaders to participate fully in this opportunity to change the lives of children and young people - and most importantly, to identify even a few clear actions that we can commit to, measure and implement between now and September. We will be contacting many of you and asking for your support and active involvement in this attempt to move from rhetoric to action.

I finish with an appeal to all of you leaders here. Many of you are parents as well as political, civil society or other types of leaders. How would you react if you were told that of your five children, two would die prematurely, but that you still had a chance to stop their deaths? Which parent wouldn't mobilise all of their financial, emotional and human resources and act immediately?

And so I come to the end of my remarks this morning. To live free of HIV/AIDS, free of its pain and suffering, free of its wanton destruction, free of its fear – this is the right of every child born in every village, every township and every city on this great continent. To ensure that right in these times - this is the indelible mark of true leadership, a measure for each of us in this room, and a most certain way to restore Africa as a continent that will protect the rights of all our people, a continent of hope and promise.

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