



REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA
SPEECH BY

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at the

AFRICA DEVELOPMENT FORUM

AIDS: The Greatest Leadership Challenge

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Your Excellencies
Heads of State
Honourable Ministers
Heads of the Diplomatic Corps
Distinguished Guests
Young Women, Young Men
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Africa is facing the greatest leadership challenge ever known to man. At this Forum, we shall agree on how, the poorest of the world's continents, representing only 5% of the world's productive human capital, having limited access to 3% of its financial resources, can meet the HIV/AIDS multi-billion Dollar challenge. We are called to respond to a supreme test of our commitment as African leaders to our people. Can all of us honestly say that we have assigned, instructed and mobilised our best professionals to move with speed and sustained determination to deal with this the greatest development emergency of our time – HIV/AIDS?

HIV/AIDS is eroding the hard won developmental gains of the past 20 years in Sub-Saharan Africa. Botswana, my country, is a glaring example of this fact.

The impact of HIV/AIDS on the population, the economy and the very fabric of our society undermines not only development but poses a serious threat to our security, and life as we know it.

According to UNAIDS statistics, Botswana is the most severely affected country, per capita, in the world.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, we have mounted a serious counter act on HIV and AIDS. I chair the National AIDS Council. Together with my Minister of Health, who is here with me today, and other Ministers and the National Assembly Select Committee on AIDS, as well as the House of Chief, we provide political leadership for the national response.

The Council has sectoral committees whose role is to develop and implement national programmes as prescribed by the Council and the National Action Plan. Apart from the traditional sectors, we have committees for men, women, youth and children.

Key Ministries such as Health, Finance, Local Government, Education, Labour and Home Affairs lead the development and refinement of strategies for prevention, care and mitigation. These Ministries mainstream AIDS into development planning and facilitate community ownership and take programmes to the communities. They also deal with the protection of children and women and the implementation of Information, Education and Communication programmes targeted at the labour force, youth and other special groups.

We have a decentralised strategy that focuses national efforts at the district and village level so as to reach people at the grassroots.

The private sector, NGOs and CBOs are represented on the National AIDS Council as well as People Living with AIDS (PLWAs) in order to ensure total community mobilisation.

Our strategy is rigorously monitored and evaluated against targets set by the new multi-sectoral approach co-ordinated by the National AIDS Council through the National AIDS Co-ordinating Agency (NACA).

In Botswana we have the following programmes:

1. House-to-house counselling. Every family must be reached.
2. HIV/AIDS curriculum at primary, secondary and tertiary institutions.
3. Voluntary testing and counselling services to be made accessible to all.
4. Preventive therapy where appropriate: such as prevention of Mother-to-Child-Transmission (MTCT), protecting HIV positive people from TB, post exposure prophylaxis for rape survivors and health workers .
5. Access to medical treatment, with the concomitant need for facilities, laboratories, health professionals, drugs for treatment of opportunistic infections and, even administration of anti-retroviral therapy
6. A home-based care strategy that does not abandon people to die alone
7. Specific programmes for orphans, for youth, for workers, men and women and People Living with AIDS.

Increasing poverty amongst single female-headed households and increase in the incidence of violence including rape require special attention. Inter-generational transmissions from older men to younger women who then transmit the virus to their peers lead to acceleration of the epidemic. This is a critical point where interventions should be targeted so as to break the transmission cycle.

Let us as Africa take responsibility for ourselves and be true leaders in fighting the greatest threat to our development and security. Let us deal with the HIV/AIDS epidemic as an emergency and respond with measures that a crisis deserves. Let us divert resources from military expenditure to fighting the HIV epidemic. Let us look within ourselves and find our solution to our problems. Our youth are our greatest asset. Let us not only protect them but include them at all levels for they have great potential for leadership both now and for the future. Youth participating in this Forum have called on creditors to give Africa grants not loans for the fight against HIV/AIDS. I endorse this call by our young leaders.

Let us be united and demand a comprehensive care package as anti-retroviral drugs alone are not a magic bullet. Let us be united in negotiating affordable prices for all drugs required in the treatment and care of our people.

I commend the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa for convening this Forum. Let us unite and resolve to act now!