

To all the Council members present

To the traditional leaders

The government Departments

Municipality Officials

To the Programme Director,

Abahlali ngokubanzi, ladies and gentlemen

It is with great pleasure that we meet here to observe the International Day of Persons living with disabilities, commemorated on December the 3rd, preceded by World AIDS on the 1st of December. We meet here in this beautiful and well architected skills centre – designed to benefit especially the people of Thabachicha and surrounding areas. This ladies and gentlemen is in fact another spectacular delivery this municipality has brought to you.

Our objective to meet here is to join the rest of the World, in tracking progress that has been made in responding to HIV/AIDS, and check what we have done to implement measures to improve the life of people with disabilities. As humanity, we have made much progress over the past decade and as a collective our efforts in responding to these have been accelerated over the past years.

As outlined in our Designated Groups Strategy, we continue to realise the objectives we set for ourselves to effectively initiate campaigns to raise awareness about the plight and rights of people with disabilities. We still have a long way to go before we can realise many elements of our dream in as far as people with disabilities are concerned. However, Programme Director, asikwazi ukungazi qhwabeli zandla ngomsebenzi omhle esiwenzileyo....nongqinelwe kuku-graduators kwe members ze-

disability sector. To ensure that people with disabilities benefit from skills development programmes in all wards of the Matatiele local municipality. Last week, about 13 people from different wards in our municipality graduated at Enoch Sontonga Rehabilitation centre. What a touching moment to see people with disabilities rising above every obstacle to attain skills in sewing, wood-work and welding. These individuals are now capable to start their own businesses and contribute to the well-being. And as the Municipality we continue to assist them in wherever possible, to realise their vision for their lives.

Xa sihlabela mgama, Programme Director, abantu abaninzi abakayazi ukuba sithethanje, izinga lokosuleleka kosana ngunina ngentsholongwane i-HIV lingaphantsi kwe 2%. This remarkable achievement has meant that we have been able to curb the rate of new infections by 30% over the past 10 years. Ukanti nezinga loku-tester kwabantu lonyuke ngeyona ndlela. Kweliphondo lethu kuphela, bangaphaya kwe 2 million abantu abaye ba tester kule-period. Asiyithathi kancinci ke lento thina, because testing for HIV is the entry point of any successful programme for HIV/AIDS. To this end, we would like to once again encourage those that have not tested to go and test...zikhona nalapha namhlanje ezo services.

We are however aware of the fact that we cannot cure ourselves out of this epidemic as the municipality, leaving out social ills. Size apha eThabaChicha in particularly ngenxa yoba siyazi ukuba lengingqi yenye yendawo ezinamanani aphezulu okosuleleka kwabantu yi-HIV. Sizothi kuni sikunye ekulweni esi sifo. Masiphathisane ukuqulunqa amaqhinga okulwa nalomceli-mngeni.

The main focus of the World AIDS day programme this year is young women. Under the theme "building tomorrow's legends today-taking

tune from the women of 1956". We know that we have a serious challenge of high levels of new HIV infections among adolescent girls and young women between the ages of 15-24. With this theme we want to show our firm belief that the current generation of women can emulate the women of 1956 by standing and take action against the spread of HIV/AIDS.

We know that the epidemic spreads within a social, political and economic context. This event is held during the period where as the country we are observing 16 days of activism against women and child abuse. The abuse of women, particularly gender based violence and sexual crimes contribute immensely to the spread of HIV. It disempowers women from making deliberate choices about safe sex. Today, we have a phenomenon known as "blessers" where young girls and women fall prey to old men by getting gifts and money in exchange for sex. This happens in a context of high unemployment and high levels of poverty where women are the most vulnerable – but we believe our girls have what it takes to tackle these challenges head-on, emulating the women of 1956.

Lastly, programme director we firmly believe that the solution to all societal problems lie within us as communities. Through Operation Masiphathisane, we encourage community members to discuss and design solutions to problems such as teenage pregnancy and keeping of girls in school. The Local AIDS Council must indeed identify key municipal wards known as hot spots – meaning those areas that carry the highest burden of HIV in all wards within the municipality. The war rooms in those wards will be given special attention by the AIDS council and we want to encourage all community members to participate in the war rooms so that we all collectively come up with solutions.

I want to make a finally plea to all who are here to participate in the HIV/AIDS response and fighting the stigma associated with people living with disabilities. Just imagine with me how these threatened to divide us as communities in the late 1990's and early 2000's. Many communities were driven by mistrust and accusations which flew from all over the place. The neighbours suspected each other of witchcraft. The church accused the traditional practitioners and people of living in sin. The communities accused government of not carrying. It almost rendered our joy of gaining freedom short lived. But once again we rose to the occasion. Today we have steadily succeeding programmes that involves sectors of society proving once again together we can do more. Masiqhubekeni, singadinwa.

We would like to thank all those that have made this event and its build up programme possible. We would also like to thank Departments of Health, Social Development, Education and implementing partners for making today possible.

Phambi kokuba ndivale, singumaspala sithanda ukudlulisa amazwi ovelwano kusapho lakwaNcwane. We heard yesterday that the award-winning gospel artist, Sfiso Ncwane, has died from suspected kidney failure at the age of 37. The role he has played in enriching and touching many people through his music cannot be forgotten. May his soul rest in perfect peace.

Sisekwezomculoi njalo ntozakuthi, singalibali....all roads lead to the OLD RUGBY FIELDS in Matatile next week Saturday. On the 17th December iimvumi zodumo zeli zizakube zikhuphisana ukukonwabisa, 2016....

Ndiyabulela.