

ADDRESS BY THE LEADER OF GOVERNMENT BUSINESS AND MEC FOR FINANCE ON BEHALF OF THE KWAZULU-NATAL PREMIER DURING WORLD TB DAY, KWAMTEYI, MHUMAYO, ALFRED DUMA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, 24 MARCH 2022

Programme Director;

MECs and MPLs;

Mayors and Councillors;

Traditional and Religious Leaders;

Business Leaders;

Representatives of Civil Society;

The Director-General of KwaZulu-Natal;

HoDs and Senior Government Officials;

Members of the Media;

Community of Alfred Duma Local Municipality and Uthukela District Municipality;

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;

On this day, 140 years ago in 1882, Dr Robert Koch informed the world about his discovery of the bacteria that causes tuberculosis. His finding opened a way for diagnosis and ultimately the curing of TB.

A century later since Dr Koch's groundbreaking discovery, humanity across the globe commemorates the 24th of March as World TB Day in order to create public awareness about the devastation caused by the diseases and how it can be prevented and ended. Our country joined the commemoration of World TB Day in 1996, following the establishment of the National TB programme.

On World TB Day, we are called on to remember friends, colleagues, and family members that we have lost to the TB epidemic. In their memory, we must unite to strengthen efforts to prevent the spread of the diseases and to raise awareness regarding its devastating social and economic consequences.

Across the globe, people are marking World TB Day 2022 under the theme: "**Invest to End TB. Save Lives**". The theme is an important call to all nations, governments, and social partners to intensify the fight against TB by increasing resources to fight the epidemic.

There is a recognition that the global focus and fight against COVID-19 has put the fight against TB on a back foot. And so, on World TB Day, we add our voice as the Province of KwaZulu-Natal and as South Africa that world leaders need to fulfil the commitments they have made to end TB and ensure equitable access to prevention and care.

In this regard, we wish to commend our own government for the huge investments it puts in the fight against TB. We also pay tribute to a number of global bodies and funds that are involved in the fight against TB.

Adapted from the global theme, South Africa and the Province of KwaZulu-Natal are marking World TB Day under the theme: **“Invest in Action to End TB Now! Get Screened. End Stigma. Save Lives”**.

The country theme calls upon all South African to act now by lending a hand in various actions towards the national efforts to end TB. Our call goes beyond financial investments, but also include human resources and the mobilization of all stakeholders to end TB.

It is also a theme that recognizes that stigma is often the real killer, not TB itself. The good news about TB is that it is curable, but the tragic news is that some people die silently for fear of being prejudiced, stigmatized, and discriminated against because they carry TB.

Research tells us that social stigma against TB patients has devastating impacts, causing major barriers against access to testing services as well as adhering to treatment.

As communities, we can rise and act by fighting the prejudice TB patients suffer.

We can be circumspect and responsible about what we say.

Let us stop gossiping and talking in hush tones when we suspect or learn that a person has TB. This goes for people who are HIV positive too. Stigma against the co-infections of TB and HIV is deadly. And still, we must always bear in mind that not all TB patients are HIV positive, and not all HIV positive patients have TB.

On World TB Day, we appeal for leadership and make an impassioned call on for new TB Champions to emerge who will help our province and country fight ignorance and stigma on TB. We want champions who will be at the forefront of saving lives.

We need to follow in the footsteps of our late global icons, Founding President Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela and Arch Bishop Desmond Tutu.

We remember that aged 12 years old, Bishop Tutu contracted tuberculosis and he was cured of it. Speaking against discrimination and exclusion of people with TB, Bishop Tutu once said:

"When someone is ill, that is already a very heavy burden to bear - if in addition to the trauma and pain and all the emotional strain of being separated from your family and your loved ones, you also have the additional burden of people wanting you to be ostracised, of making out that this is a disease that decent people shouldn't have."

Eighteen years ago in 2004, former President Nelson Mandela who also contracted TB in prison in 1988 said the following in his address to the International AIDS Conference in Bangkok:

"TB is too often a death sentence for people with AIDS. It does not have to be this way. We have known how to cure TB for more than 50 years. What we have lacked is the will and the resources to quickly diagnose people with TB and get them the treatment they need."

Ladies and Gentlemen, the South African National Aids Council (SANAC) through its National Strategic Plan (NSP) on HIV, TB, and STI's does exactly what tata Madiba asked the world to do – to give equal attention to the co-infections of TB and HIV and to accelerate the screening and treatment of TB. As we face COVID-19, we must not take our eyes away from the TB and HIV, lest we reverse all the gains we have made so far.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) reveals that with our combined efforts to screen people for TB and to put them on life-saving medication, we have saved 66 million lives since the year 2000.

Still in 2022, TB continues to be a leading cause of death, in particular to patients who are HIV positive.

The WHO says that 9.9-million fell sick with TB in 2020 and of these, 1.5-million died of TB.

We cannot afford to relent in our fight against the epidemic, and we know that the coronavirus pandemic has reversed the progress we have been making in the fight to end TB.

All data shows that globally, for the first time in 10 years, TB deaths increased in 2020. The WHO estimated mortality in South Africa is 61 000 – and 31 000 of those who lost their lives were People Living with HIV. This is an increase of 58 000 compared to 2019.

The World Health Organisation estimates that every day, over 4 100 people globally lose their lives to tuberculosis. Each day, about 28,000 across the globe people still contract this preventable and curable disease. . In South Africa alone, about 167 people die daily because of TB.

What is more worrying is that drug-resistant TB (DR-TB) continues to pose a major health threat and could put at risk gains made in efforts to end TB. We wish to emphasise to all our communities that it is important to adhere to treatment and for patients to finish their course in order to prevent drug-resistant TB.

We urge families and caregivers to support patients to take their medication as prescribed by health professionals. As families and communities, we also have a duty to support those who have defaulted to return to our clinics and hospitals to get help with speed. On World TB Day, we call on all members of society to help us trace patients who have stopped their medication and for people to get screened on time.

We urge the people of Uthukela District Municipality and KwaZulu-Natal to assist government in finding the missing TB patients. In addition, we want to trace all people who have had contact with people who have TB so that we can screen them for the diseases and put them on treatment.

We want to assure those who have defaulted that they will not be condemned, judged, or ostracised. We want them to be a part of our “Welcome Back” to care campaign so that we can arrest the spread of TB and defeat it.

Compatriots, our research shows that KwaZulu-Natal has the highest prevalence of drug-resistant TB in South Africa and that our provincial MDR TB incidence rate per 100 000 population is among the highest in the world.

We also know that adults, in particular men, are more at risk of developing TB. This means that as a Province, we must have a targeted approach to encourage men to get screened and those that have TB to be immediately put on medication.

Ladies and Gentlemen, our country is said to be one of the 30 high burden TB countries in the world. We account for no less than 3.3% of the global TB cases. In South Africa, high rates of TB are fuelled by the HIV epidemic and socio-economic status. This makes KwaZulu-Natal which is the epicentre of the HIV epidemic in South Africa to be also the epicentre of TB, in particular our populous metro of eThekweni.

The Provincial Government of KwaZulu-Natal decided to host the provincial TB Day Commemoration here because we have noticed an increase in TB-related deaths in the Uthukela District Municipality. To overcome the challenge, we need all hands on deck from all sectors of this society.

One sector that we seeking to bring in this fight against tuberculosis is the business sector of Uthukela District Municipality and this local municipality of Alfred Duma. It is for this reason that we spent the morning interacting with a number of owners of a number of SMMEs. We also engaged the local taxi industry and shared vital, life-saving information on TB.

Compatriots, our studies on TB in Uthukela and other areas reveal that failure to pay sick leave for TB patients hinders our efforts in fighting the disease. With the deep poverty and high unemployment levels, TB patients end up not reporting at work that they are sick. Many face the prospect of losing their jobs while on sick leave, hence some end up defaulting on treatment or not informing their employers or colleagues for fear of losing their jobs or being marginalised.

As the government, we also understand that some of the SMMEs are also struggling financially and that may explain why they don't pay for sick leave. Today we have been able to raise this issue to make everyone aware of the dangers that are already prevalent. We encourage our SMMEs to pay sick leave and to encourage workers to report if they have the disease. We must definitely continue to engage the SMME sector in KwaZulu-Natal through the KZN AIDS Council which is led by the Premier.

Compatriots, let us all remember that TB is not a death sentence. It is both preventable and curable.

Bear in mind that access to tuberculosis care is a right, not a favour, so exercise your right.

Our message today is simple. Get Screened. End Stigma. Save Lives!

Getting tested for TB is quick, easy and free. The Province of KwaZulu-Natal continues to invest in latest technology for TB screening. With our latest technology, you can get your TB results in 15 minutes.

Please get tested for TB if you have been coughing for more than two weeks.

Fever, unexplained weight loss, and flooding sweats at night could be symptoms of TB, so get tested as soon as possible to prevent TB spreading to your loved ones or co-workers.

We can prevent the spread of TB by taking simple actions like covering our mouths and noses when cough or sneeze.

Let us also get in the habit of increasing the flow of air in crowded places and crowded spaces. Opening a bus or taxi window helps to increase air flow for instance.

Treating TB improves the body's ability to fight other infections, including COVID-19 and HIV. Healthcare workers inform us that people with lung damage, such as people with TB, or those with weak immune systems, including those with poorly controlled HIV, may suffer from more severe forms of COVID-19 if infected.

To our healthcare workers, let us double our efforts in finding people with TB who are lost-to-follow-up. Let us welcome them back to care and retain them on treatment. Similarly, let's find the missing people with TB, test them and speedily link them to care.

We call on our leaders, including those in business and the SMME sector, to invest in the fight against TB and to stand up against stigma and discrimination. Our leaders must ensure that the TB response is community-centred, rights-based and gender-responsive.

Let us not reverse the gains we have made in the fight against TB over many years.

In many parts of the developing world, diseases like TB, HIV, and even COVID-19 thrive in conditions of poverty, inequality, violence, and lack of access to health care.

People with TB are among the most vulnerable and face a number of barriers in accessing quality healthcare.

On World TB Day, we call on all social partners and leaders to work together to eliminate health inequities. In our own South African case, let us forge ahead with the implementation of the National Health Insurance to make sure that there is quality universal health coverage regardless of people's station in life.

It is in our hands to end TB.

Play your part.

Invest in Action to End TB Now! *Get Screened. End Stigma. Save Lives!*

Together Growing KwaZulu-Natal!

I thank you!