

SPEAKING NOTES FOR MEC BELINDA SCOTT DURING THE MSUNDIZI HIV/AIDS CRUSADE.

TUESDAY, 14 JUNE 2016.

The 21st International AIDS Conference, commonly known as AIDS2016, will be held from 18 to 22 July 2016, at the Albert Luthuli International Convention Centre in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal under the theme: Access Equity Rights – Now, a call to action to work together and reach the people who still lack access to comprehensive treatment, prevention, care and support services.

To ensure the success of this event, President Jacob Zuma recently established an Inter-Ministerial Committee on the Conference comprising of 16 Ministers, the Premier of KZN as well as the Mayor of eThekweni.

The Committee held its meeting today, in the host city of eThekweni, where we were appraised on the state of readiness by national, provincial and local government to host AIDS 2016.

The Committee received an update on infrastructure, security, health and immigration plans for the International AIDS Conference.

The Committee also conducted an inspection of the Chief Albert Luthuli ICC and surrounding facilities to assess logistical arrangements. This includes the interplay between events in the main conference venue as well as the nearby Global Village, an open access space with free conference programming that will allow members of the public to partake in the conference.

We are satisfied that indeed South Africa is ready to welcome the world and to host a successful AIDS 2016 where history will be made in advancing the global fight against HIV, AIDS and TB.

The International AIDS Conference is the largest conference on any global health or development issues in the world. First convened during the peak of the epidemic in 1985, it continues to provide a unique forum for the intersection of science, advocacy, and human rights.

The world's top scientists, civil society members and policymakers will convene at AIDS2016 to discuss the fight against HIV and AIDS.

The Conference, initially held in 2000 was a watershed moment in our national response to and global action on the AIDS epidemic. The return to Durban is an opportunity to take stock of the progress the world is making in improving access to prevention, treatment and eliminating stigma associated with HIV and AIDS. Conference.

Indeed, the international community will join South Africa in recalling the impassioned and poignant plea of the child activist, Nkosi Johnson, who in the year 2000 bore the distinction of being the longest-surviving child born with HIV in the country.

Nkosi Johnson brought home the impact of the AIDS epidemic with a self-written address, which was broadcast globally, carrying his call for treatment and care for people living with HIV.

Several months later, Nkosi Johnson died at the age of 12.

In 2016, we continue to honour Nkosi's brave and short-lived struggle and we continue to build on his legacy.

SOUTH AFRICA'S JOURNEY

AIDS 2016 provides a platform for our country to tell the story of our journey.

Today, our response to HIV and AIDS is framed by a combination of our own National Development Plan, the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations.

South Africa has the world's biggest HIV and AIDS treatment programme, which started in earnest with the launch of the world's biggest testing campaign, popularly known as HCT campaign in 2010.

18 million South Africans tested to know their status within 18 months of the HCT campaign.

And today, about 10 million South Africans test on an annual basis.

AIDS deaths in South Africa declined from 320 000 in 2010 to 140 000 in 2014, and mother-to-child transmission of HIV reduced from 70 000 babies in 2004 to less than 7 000 in 2015.

However, we continue to face an uphill battle in socio-behavioural changes, especially in the age group of 15 to 24 among girls and young women.

In this age cohort, there are 5 000 new infections per week in 14 Southern and Eastern African countries - but half of these occur in South Africa alone.

While we have come a long way, our struggle against HIV, AIDS and TB continues.

AIDS 2016 presents South Africa with an opportunity to showcase achievements, share its challenges and be exposed to developments globally that can help us prevent new infections, step up treatment and care and end discrimination and stigma.