

**ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF LABOUR ON THE  
OCCASION OF THE LAUNCH OF THE ILO MULTI-  
COUNTRY STUDY ON EFFECTIVE RESPONSES TO HIV  
AND AIDS AT WORK.**

***Friday, 24 April 2015***

Programme Director

Minister of Health; Dr Aaron Motsoaledi

ILO Regional Director; Mr Vic van Vuuren

Directors General here present

Captains of Industries, CEOs, MD's and Senior Executives

Members of the Diplomatic Corp

His Excellency; Ambassador Skymoen

Leaders of our Social Partners, Business, Labour and  
Community Formations

Leaders of Non-Governmental Institutions

Representatives of Research Institutions from home and  
Abroad

Distinguished Guests

Friends and Comrades

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

**We** are meeting at the time when our country is going through despicable acts of violence against foreign nationals. The attacks on foreign nationals must be condemned in the strongest terms possible. The recent attacks are a threat to our historical achievements as a nation and they go against the essence and the letter of our constitution. These attacks violate all the values that South Africa embodies therefore are unacceptable and should not be tolerated by any of us.

Needless to say that this is indeed in sharp contrast with the fact that barely a month from today is the Africa Day, a Day when all Africans celebrate the vision of our fore-bearers who on 25 May 1963 founded the Organisation of African Unity, the precursor to the African Union.

It is not by accident Ladies and Gentlemen that to this day, the Freedom Charter has remained the cornerstone of the Ruling Party's policies and it is, in all accounts the foundation of the South African Constitution. In June we will be commemorating the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Freedom Charter. We must recall that the Congress of the People, and I mean the real Congress of the People that gathered in Kliptown in 1955 and not in Sandton, gave a clear mandate to the democratic government that, **and I quote**, "There shall be Peace and Security in the Democratic South Africa", **Close quote**. A far cry from the acts of thuggery that we have witnessed recently, I dare say.

Government urges all South Africans not to allow a few individuals to reverse and undermine our historical achievements. No amount of frustration or anger can ever justify the attacks on foreign nationals and the looting of their shops. We call on all our stakeholders business, labour and civil society to join hands with us in ensuring that these attacks come to an end. We thank the public and the media for coming out against xenophobic attacks against foreign nationals.

**Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen;** my job this morning is that of launching the ILO study which thereafter becomes a resource for all of us to use without the constraint of copyright, I guess.

Now that the study has been outlined, I have no intention of over labouring the salient findings that speakers before me have already touched on, but I will merely para-phrase one or two critical findings and recommendations in the study as I move along. I also do not want to take too much of your time in a long speech and diminish your appetite to read the study, its findings and recommendations on your own.

**But, before I formally launch the report,** let me very briefly touch on South Africa in numbers within the context of HIV and AIDS of course. Stats-SA estimated that the South African population stood at about 54 million in 2014 and fifty percent of that were women. Life expectancy at birth for males was

estimated at 59.1 years and 63.1 years for females. It is also estimated that overall HIV prevalence rate was approximately 10.2 percent of the total South African population.

The total number of people living with HIV was estimated at approximately 5.51 million in 2014, which is an increase from 4.09 million in 2002.

This is a huge number and worrying by any standards and it could easily be equivalent to a total population of some countries in our Continent.

**Programme Director, Ladies and Gentleman,** The study shows that in general terms new HIV and AIDS infections have declined steadily over the last decade, thanks to key interventions such behaviour change communications, condoms, prevention of mother-to-child transmission, widespread circumcision campaigns and other preventive measures. This is also confirmed by the studies elsewhere in the world which indicated that in 2013, the world registered 2.3 million new HIV infections, a 33 percent decline from 2001 levels.

The Global Fund points out that the decline in number of new HIV infections is not only the result of increased prevention; it also correlates with an increase in the number of people accessing HIV treatment.

It also points out that putting an HIV-positive person on treatment reduces their chances of transmitting the virus by as much as 90 percent.

There are many success stories in the African continent from which we can all learn.

Whilst it is important to recognise that there is no one size fits all in dealing HIV and AIDS there is a lot that could be implemented across countries with very little adaptation. The trouble of course is that it is not easy, and often very expensive, to convene regular multi-country sessions in the continent to share experiences and lessons.

Therefore I submit that the ILO study could not have come at a better time, given that it provides the African perspective and what works in less than 200 pages which are not threatening for anybody to read.

I presume the cost of doing this was by far less than what it would have cost to convene multi-country group meetings to gather the depth of information that the study was able to put together.

Today the study provides a window through which we can observe and learn from what is being done elsewhere in the continent.

It also provides various benchmarks that could be used to strengthen our various monitoring and evaluations mechanisms.

The study once again proof that with commitment and through unity, there is very little that cannot be achieved. The progress to date is the living example that HIV and AIDS can be defeated.

Noting that workplace interventions in dealing with HIV and AIDS have been going on for many years, it was appropriate that we get a view and a non-partisan analysis of whether or not these interventions were working optimally. The lessons that can be gleaned from what various countries are doing are indeed invaluable.

Thanks to the ILO team for the job well done and I think it is befitting to call this ***“The African Continent ILO Membership Fees at work.”***

We are pleased that the study in its analysis concluded inter alia that;

- a) Increasing knowledge on HIV and AIDS is not just a good outcome, but it is critical to the achievement of other good outcomes.

- b) Voluntary Counselling and Testing is a proven strategy that empowers people to take the steps needed to know their HIV status and, if necessary, seek treatment.
- c) Changing or reducing risky behaviours is another good outcome that is critically important to slowing the advance of HIV and AIDS.
- d) Reducing stigma and discrimination is an important outcome in that it has an impact on the successful achievement of the other good outcomes.
- e) The life-saving potential of ART is well known and has significantly improved the global HIV and AIDS landscape, especially in terms of enabling employed People Living with HIV and their partners, families and communities to enjoy longer and healthier lives.
- f) Management and Worker leaders are key in creating a conducive environment for these things to happen.

Despite all of the progress achieved to date, we must not be complacent, but continue in our search for innovative interventions to better the outcomes even more.

**Distinguished Guests and Friends,** The war against HIV and AIDS is still far from being won in the African continent, so, let us use the study to tool and retool for the road ahead.

Given the size of the challenge, there is no way that any one stakeholder alone can crack this, therefore building public, private partnerships is the way to go. By pooling resources, workplaces can significantly broaden their sphere of influence, and improve the efficiency of their efforts.

This is particularly important for small businesses, that otherwise may not be able to participate due to financial and human resource constraints.

The study also points out in its findings, that the most successful interventions were those where workers were part and parcel of conceptualisation, design and execution of the interventions. Let us embrace this approach as it represents international best practice.

**Ladies and Gentlemen:** To the employers who have shown real commitment and leadership in our effort to deal with this scourge, we say, be an example to those in the board rooms who have not as yet seen the light. We acknowledge and commend your foresight in treating these initiatives as integral part of doing business. We often hear some business leaders in conferences, arguing that their biggest asset was its people, but do absolutely nothing to invest time and resources in

keeping that very asset in a good state of health. Unlike those, you are here with us every step of the way.

We are pleased that a sizeable number of the Captains of industry have become truly good corporate citizens and are truly committed to working with us on this front. To the leaders of civil society formations, we thank you for keeping all of us in check, which helps to take a pulse on whether or not we are still on the right track in our chosen forms of interventions.

Let me echo the sentiments under acknowledgements in the study, to say thank you to all of you, who contributed to the making of this study. It is now truly ours to use in shaping and enhancing our workplace responses.

Thank you to all the leaders of the various constituencies for the value and the time that you attached to this work. Thanks to Businesses that allowed our researchers to document the goings-on in your workplaces. To the ILO, we say thank you for heeding our call for assistance and as always, you have delivered. To funders of this project, we are indeed grateful for your invaluable support.

The report is formally launched Ladies and Gentlemen, not to collect dust on our filing cabinets, but to be used as a reference point when crafting our interventions.

**Finally**, let's all go out there and call for the end to the senseless xenophobic attacks on foreign nationals in South Africa.

**Together let us move South Africa and the African  
Continent Forward.**

**I thank you**