

SPEAKING NOTES FOR HON MIN DR ZWELINI MKHIZE

MEN'S PARLIAMENT

19 NOVEMBER 2020

Deputy Speaker

Honourable Members of Parliament

Today, as we commemorate International Men's Day in this Men's Parliamentary sitting, we find ourselves in the midst of an extraordinary time which has compelled us to re-examine our roles as men in a progressive society.

Here, we take the opportunity to mould men who will bring positive values to their families, communities and the world at large.

This year, our sector will celebrate International Men's Day under the theme, "Better Health for Men and Boys". This is an earnest call to the global community to make practical improvements towards the health and wellbeing of the male population.

I feel honoured and privileged to be afforded this unique opportunity to address a House full of men from all corners of our country, united under the *Takuwani Riime Responsive Men's Movement*.

In 2015, President Cyril Ramaphosa, who was Deputy President and Chairperson of SANAC at the time, led the launch of Takuwani

Riime alongside the SANAC Men's Sector and other formations working with men and boys. Since then much progress has been made leading up to this year's two-day sitting of the National Men's Parliament. We give credit to the men at the forefront of driving this initiative to where it is today.

As we collectively celebrate the gains achieved by the Takuwani Riime movement, we should remain fully cognisant that, as a progressive society, we can always look further and reach higher grounds even as we reach our set targets.

Two years ago, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced that government would take critical steps to eliminate HIV and TB by scaling up testing and treatment services. He also emphasized the need to pay careful attention to non-communicable diseases. This culminated in the launch of the Cheka Impilo National Wellness Campaign that has the following targets for December 2020:

- Screen and test 14 million people for HIV, TB & STIs
- Find at least 7 million cases of non-communicable diseases
- Initiate an additional 2 million people on antiretroviral therapy
- Find the 80 thousand missing TB patients, initiate and retain them on treatment

One of the challenges in meeting such targets is the reluctance of men to access health services. Men tend to present late in the stages of illness. We acknowledge that more needs to be done to

persuade men to seek medical attention early before an illness becomes permanently debilitating, particularly diabetes, hypertension and cancers. Men need to be educated in particular on prostate cancers as it is a manageable cancer if found early. The other aspect is mental health may appear as very mild but can have dire consequences if not managed- they can manifest in many forms of abuse such as physical, sexual and psychological. We need to ensure that men understand the issue of equality between men and women and recognize that patriarchy no longer plays a role in our society.

I say to the men gathered here today, Cheka Impilo and know your status because early detections save lives and it's important for us to know that prevention is better than cure.

Our prosperity depends on fit, healthy, economically active citizens. Investment into the health, well being and longevity of our men will have a multiplier effect economically and socially. We have committed to this investment, in line with the tenets of Universal Health Coverage under the National Health Insurance.

As we countdown to the start of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence it is incumbent, at this juncture, to remind ourselves of the sheer magnitude of the burden of GBV and femicide in this country.

Goal 4 of the current National Strategic Plan (NSP) for HIV, TB and STIs for the period 2017 to 2022 identifies gender-based violence as one of the social and structural drivers of the HIV pandemic.

Indeed Gender Based Violence exerts enormous pressure on the health care system. Earlier this year, there were 87 000 cases of GBV reported within the first week of the lockdown. In terms of domestic violence cases reported in SAPS' quarterly statistics, women and girl children were predominantly victims across many serious crime categories - 53% of murder victims, 93% of rapes, 96% of all sexual assaults, 71% of attempted murders and assault with the intent to do grievous bodily harm. A number of these is violence inflicted by those who are close to the victims themselves.

One of the issues that came into sharp focus during the COVID-19 pandemic was the direct relationship we elicited between alcohol consumption and societal harms, such as trauma and Gender Based Violence.

The Medical Research Council has studied the volatile relationship between alcohol and gender based violence and described it as follows:

“Harmful alcohol use is a well-documented driver of GBV, and drinking, especially binge drinking by men appears to increase both the frequency and severity of partner abuse. Alcohol's disinhibitory effect can escalate quarrelling into violence - especially important

when couples drink at harmful levels together. Infidelity when drinking and spending resources on alcohol and not household essentials may also trigger conflict. Problems associated with harmful drinking are inseparably linked to other key drivers of GBV, namely gender inequitable masculinity, poverty, depression and childhood trauma. Women survivors of GBV are likely to enter into a vicious cycle of poor mental health and alcohol misuse which in itself increases the risk of being subjected further to GBV.”

I may as well also add that children who grow up in these environments are likely to enter into similar vicious cycles of alcohol abuse and violence.

These realities that lead to socioeconomic distress and put pressure on the health care system need to be discussed frankly and openly.

The Men Championing Change Programme of Action for the period 2020 to 2022 is an initiative targeting 90-90-90 cascades for men at district level. We note that the progress of this plan of action shall be reported at the quarterly District Men’s Parliaments and that continuous monitoring and evaluation will then culminate into evidence-based programme design and implementation.

As the Department of Health, we welcome this plan of action and pledge our support and commitment to facilitate the process where necessary.

We call on all the men of South Africa to partner with us as Health in combating HIV, TB, Coronavirus and non-communicable diseases, including Gender Based Violence and Femicide.

As South Africa, we have mounted a formidable COVID-19 response that is an emblem of crisis management globally and we believe that with our Resurgence Plan we will be able to confront any further threat.

There have been good, dedicated, brave and tough men who have weathered this storm in service to their fellow South Africans. In this Men's Parliament, we salute our frontline workers- doctors, nurses, emergency personnel, allied professionals, pharmacists, porters, cleaners, community health workers and all other health professionals- who have fought at the coalface of one of humanities greatest challenges. May the souls of those who fell in the line of duty rest in peace.

In closing, I call on all men to partner with women and share a sense of solidarity as we tackle the myriad of health and social challenges we face as humanity. Too often, what we see manifesting on a day to day basis is men at odds with women. This is what causes women to believe that men are at war with them. This we have to resolve as men can never live alone on this earth. We must foster continuous harmonious relations with women and bring an end to gender based violence.

The reforms we yearn for will begin with the conscious actions of every man in this room.

Each one of us can be a champion of change. It is truly in our hands, as men, to be the change we want to see.

I thank You.