

REMARKS BY OUTGOING CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF  
THE

NATIONAL AIDS COMMISSION,

MR KEKETSO SEFEANE

AT THE FAREWELL OCCASION FOR THE

BOARD MEMBERS

AND

THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

HELD AT

MASERU SUN CONVENTION CENTRE

ON

13 MARCH 2009

His Majesty, King Letsie III  
The Right Honourable, the Prime Minister  
Cabinet Ministers, in particular Hon Dr. M. Phooko  
Your Excellencies, Heads of Diplomatic Missions and International  
Organisations  
Distinguished Members of the UN Systems, Diplomatic Corps and  
Development Partners  
Esteemed Chairperson and former members of NAC Board present  
Senior Public, Private and Civil Society Sector Officials  
Distinguished guests,  
Members of the HIV & AIDS Forum,  
Management and staff of NAC  
Ladies and Gentlemen  
All protocol observed

I wish to thank the Director of Ceremonies for also giving me the opportunity to bid farewell to the august gathering of hopefully well wishers. I also wish to thank you all for being present to share and contribute in this historic and indeed a memorable event. Had it not been the desire of the Government to appoint me to serve in this position, this event would have been a pipe dream. I therefore, should upfront thank the Right Hon. the Prime Minister for entrusting me with this responsibility and sincerely hope that I delivered in accordance with my mandate. Most importantly I should thank my dear spouse for agreeing to join me tonight. I have carefully listened to remarks after remarks when my story with NAC was unfolded. I was amazed that people were able to relate my resume with such precision. I'm therefore indebted to all of you.

### **Director of Ceremonies**

It is my brief and genuine expectation that I should also make few remarks in this auspicious occasion. To compliment what has already been said eloquently by previous speakers, I propose to take you through the four (4) year journey representing my tour of office with NAC effective from 01 March 2005 to 28 February 2009. This journey can easily be divided into the four phases of conceptualization (Mar 2005 to March 2006); inception (April 2006 to March 2007); operationalisation (April 2007 to March 2008); and consolidation (April 2008 to February 2009). This has been a journey with mixed emotions. Daunting challenges to begin with and to overcome; frustrations; as well as cherished and celebrated moments of success.

The Conceptualisation Phase (March 2005 to March 2006) started with my assumption of office on 01 March 2005 when NAC was virtually non-existent.

Some people in our midst would probably recall that in October 2003, the Cabinet had made the following key policy decisions:

- That the document styled: “Turning Crises into an Opportunity – Scaling-up National Response to HIV and AIDS” be adopted as an official working document;
- That the National AIDS Commission(NAC) be established to coordinate the National Response to HIV and AIDS
- That Lesotho AIDS Programme Coordinating Authority be turned into a Secretariat for NAC; and
- That HIV and AIDS be mainstreamed in all public sector policies and programmes.

A month before I assumed duties, a stakeholders' validation workshop was held on the comprehensive Draft HIV and AIDS Bill which also embraced establishment of structures such as NAC. Consequently, it became my first priority to review the Concept Paper on NAC as well as the Draft HIV and AIDS Bill. Based on close consultations with the Cabinet Sub-Committee on HIV and AIDS and its Technical Working Group as a reference point, it was agreed to extract relevant clauses from the Draft HIV and AIDS Bill for the purposes of establishing NAC and shelf the rest of the document. Consequently, a specific Draft Bill for the establishment of NAC was drawn; processed through the necessary cabinet clearances and final approvals by Parliament. NAC Act 2005 was therefore the final product that was proclaimed by Gazette pronouncing the effective date as 14 September 2005.

The NAC Act 2005 clearly spells out the core mandate and functions of NAC, establishment, functions and regulations for the three (3) organs, viz: the Board of Commissioners (Board), HIV & AIDS Forum (Forum) and the National AIDS Secretariat (Secretariat) as well as their broad operational parameters. NAC also embraces an expansion of the UN “three ones” principles of One agreed HIV & AIDS Action Framework that provides basis for coordinating the work of all partners; One Coordinating Authority with a broad-based multi-sectoral mandate; and One agreed country level M&E system; to include One HIV & AIDS Fund that provides basis for pooling all resources together. It therefore remained for the CE to interpret the Act, design and implement the best vehicle to ensure successful attainment of the NAC’s mandate. The first step was to establish a 14 member HIV and AIDS Forum in September 2005 so as to solicit nominations for the Commissioner- Stakeholders’ Portfolio in the NAC Board. This was immediately followed by advert and call for nominations for the Board Chairperson and the remaining portfolio’s of Commissioners Legal, Finance and Health. The entire Board was finally approved by the Right Honourable the Prime Minister in November and subsequently gazetted in December 2005. Letters of offer for appointments were prepared and the Board ultimately assumed office by 01 April 2006.

In the interim, CE had proceeded with detailed design of the organogram, budgets and operational policies and procedures to facilitate the establishment of the Secretariat pending necessary approvals by Board once in office. It had also been necessary to undertake an environmental scan of the national HIV and AIDS response as a prerequisite for establishing a new policy and strategic direction. The scope of services for the joint review of the national response were drawn and endorsed by the key stakeholders including provision of the requisite funding. The necessary structures of the Joint Review Secretariat, a team of ten (10) consultants (drawn from local and regional pool), National Steering Committee and four (4) thematic technical teams were established. The Joint Review exercise commenced in October 2005 and was concluded in February 2006. This was subsequently followed by engagement of another set of four (4) consultants split equally to undertake simultaneous exercise of review and development of the new National HIV & AIDS Policy as well as a Five Year Strategic Plan (2006-2011) which was concluded by May 2006.

### **Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen**

It is important to refresh your minds about the key findings of the Joint Review exercise so that you can judge for yourself if progress was made on the national response under the leadership and coordination of NAC: These findings included, inter alia:

- Fragmented HIV & AIDS response due to inadequate coordination;
- Donor driven response and lack of national ownership;
- Lack of capacity for various implementing partners (government, district structures, private sector and civil society organizations);
- Various key drivers of the epidemic were reconfirmed;
- HIV and AIDS awareness but inadequate behavioural change amongst the nation;
- Low roll-out of ARV due to inadequate infrastructure and human capital limitations various.

Other key initiatives undertaken during the conceptualization period included: production of UNGASS 2003-2005 Report; hosting of the 1<sup>st</sup> SADC National AIDS Authorities meeting in November 2005; and World AIDS Day Commemoration marked with the launch of KYS and Bayler College Paediatric Centre of Excellence.

### **Director of Ceremonies**

Allow me to shift gear and provide highlights of the Inception Phase – April 2006 to March 2007. As already mentioned, the Boards assumed duties in April 2006, more than a year later than the CE. The Board was therefore pre-occupied with review and approval of all instruments necessary to facilitate the establishment

and operations of the Secretariat. These included: organogram, host of operational policies and procedures, NAC Strategic Plan 2006-2011, NAC Business Plan and Budget. This was followed by the recruitment and gradual population of the Secretariat's Organogram. Grants making guidelines were established, first set of grants approved and management of various implementing partners (IPs) commenced. The Board also approved the 1<sup>st</sup> unqualified Financial Audit of NAC as well as the key instruments guiding the national response, viz: the National HIV & AIDS Policy, Strategic Plan 2006-2011, M&E Plan and Framework for coordinating the National Response. The World AIDS Day held at Quthing on 01 December 2006 saw the launch of NAC, National HIV and AIDS Policy, Strategic Plan 2006-2011 as well as M&E Plan during WAD held at Quthing on 01 Dec 2006. At the regional front, the CE assumed Chairmanship of the SADC NAA Meeting and Technical HIV and AIDS Advisory Committee.

Like any other new organization, teething problems and challenges were encountered. Further capacity enhancement for the Board, management and staff were identified as crucial for the operational phase. The Board had to meet regularly to comprehend the nature of NAC, review comprehensive policy and strategic documents and together with management went through a learning phase. Management and staff recruited from all walks of life had to hit the ground running but more importantly to be fully inducted and aligned to the mission, vision and values of a new organization. They unfortunately had to cope with a train that had already gathered speed and had to put in more hours to what has been affectionately known as "third shift". It was imperative that NAC had to quickly adapt and develop strategies to collaborate, partner and win the support of the various stakeholders.

### **Distinguished guests**

Let me also give you a taste of the Operational Phase –April 2007 to March 2008. Implementation of the various operational policies and procedures & further new submissions went through the Board. Establishment of supporting systems and computerization was accomplished. Based on the needs assessment, capacity building for the Board, management and staff was gradually addressed. Implementation of all the key national instruments of policy, strategic plan, M&E plan and Coordination Framework became the major focus. Policy framework was being cascaded into sector and individual organisations especially the workplaces. Strategic plan was carved into an Annual Operational Plan to be tracked on quarterly basis. Various coordination structures were either newly established or being strengthened (i.e. umbrella bodies such as LENEPHWA, LIRAC, LENASO, LYF, FIDA, Lesotho Sports & Recreation Commission etc, thematic teams, M&E Working Group, Condom Programming, and Media Practitioners). Capacity building targeting various stakeholders was being implemented. Quarterly Partnership Fora and Annual Partnership Forum were held. Other significant achievements included preparation of UNGASS

Report for 2006-2007; preparation of the National AIDS Spending Assessment Report; capacity building to district structures in strengthening the “gate way” approach including the launch of Essential Services Package (ESP); adoption of the HIV and AIDS Research Agenda and Unqualified Audited Financial Statements.

Some of the key challenges during the Operational Phase included: negative perceptions about the size and compensation for staff; governance issues pertaining roles and responsibilities; and inadequate support and commitment from some key policy and strategic partners.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

The final chapter of my tenure with NAC is the Consolidation Phase – April 2008 to February 2009. To consolidate my mission, there was need to continue with further capacity building for the Board, Forum and Secretariat. Further submission and approval policies and procedures including the Governance Policy & Manual was done. The Information Management System was strengthened including launch of the NAC website; financial computerization of the Finance including Human Resources Systems. Development Partners Forum was established in replacement of Expanded Theme Group on HIV & AIDS. Collaborations, partnerships and harmonization of the national response were a cross-cutting theme between NAC and key partners. Advocacy and communication about NAC and the national response was intensified. Promotional materials including Quarterly newsletter were circulated for public consumption. Behavioral Change and Communication Strategy was completed. Through commendable partnership with Southern African HIV/AIDS Information and Dissemination Service (SAfAIDS), a National HIV and AIDS Resource Centre was established and launched by the Hon. Dr Motloheloa Phooko (Minister in the Office of the PM). Leadership was engaged in various fora as part of the WAD theme. The Board and the Secretariat resolved to undergo public HIV testing as demonstration of leadership commitment.

On the Research Agenda, the key studies of Multiple and Concurrent Sexual Partnership (MCP) as well as the Modes of Transmission (MOT) were undertaken. The results were rolled-out locally but have also attracted a lot of regional and international interest which has resulted in actual presentations in various fora.

As part of the consolidation phase, there was also need to undertake the performance review of both NAC and the National Response. Internal performance assessment of NAC has been documented in the Annual Financial Audit and Performance Review of NAC by the Office of the Auditor General as well as an independent consultant to review the current design of the NAC

Structure. It is gratifying to note that all these exercises have confirmed that NAC is on course save for some areas which need to be strengthened in future.

At the national level, Mid-term review of the National Strategic Plan is in progress to be completed by end of March. Various groups of stakeholders at the national and district levels have been consulted. This is taking into consideration new developments including results of the MCP and MOT studies. The NASA Report was updated and finalized. Preparations are underway to embark on a Demographic Health Survey in collaboration with the Ministry of Health & Social Welfare.

### **Director of Ceremonies,**

It would be remiss of me, if I do not as well provide highlights on the national response. The landscape has significantly improved over the past 4 years. Although, the prevalence rate has stabilized at 23.2%, notable reductions have been achieved at the age groups of 15-19 and 40-49 whilst the age groups of 25 to 39 remains at high risk of infection. The adult incidence rates have dropped by about 19% from 2.9 to 2.35%. New infections have declined by about 17% (26,000-21,558). AIDS mortality rate has equally dropped by 25% (24,000-18,000). AIDS related OVC's has increased by about 12% (97,000-108,700). However, ART projections have increased by about 91% from 42,640 to 81,270 due to changes in estimates model.

More people have come back to take HIV test as a result of the "know your status" campaign from the estimated 50,000 in 2004 to over 400,000 by end of 2008. PMTCT facilities have increased from 9 in 2004 to 166 with coverage of about 25,000 pregnant women to date (an increase from 3.1 % in 2004 to 41.6% by end of 2008. The number of health centres providing ART had increased to about 125 by end of September 2008. The enrollment on ART has risen from about 422 in 2004 to close to 60,000 (57,460) including over 4000 children. There is significant reduction in stigma and discrimination as more people are living openly with the virus due to Greater Involvement and Participation of PLWHA such as LENEHWA. Several stakeholders are also providing the much needed comprehensive support to Orphaned and Vulnerable Children. Leadership commitment and policy environment has improved.

However, it is also important to acknowledge the following key challenges:

- Institutional capacity for coordinating structures
- Inadequate reporting & adherence to M&E System
- Inadequate leadership commitment
- Sustainability of NAC given the changes in governance and possible restructuring
- Low absorptive capacity for implementing partners
- Inadequate behaviour change i.e. multiple and concurrent sexual partnerships

- Universal access to prevention; treatment, care & support; and impact mitigatory services
- Basket pooling of HIV & AIDS resources
- HIV & AIDS Legislation

### **Distinguished guest, ladies and gentlemen**

Let me also give you my thoughts about the way forward in order to scale-up the national response. It is imperative that there is a concerted effort in the institutional strengthening of NAC and other coordinating structures. Leadership commitment from Govt, Development Partners and all policy makers should be enhanced. There has to be an honest reflection on the mandate of NAC, achievements, challenges and sustainability as opposed to drastic restructuring. Capacity building to all implementing partners especially the district structures, self coordinating entities, private sector and civil society organizations has to be intensified. The M&E system through capacity building, service level agreements and mandatory progress reporting to NAC has to be enhanced including establishment of M&E Technical Working Groups in all the Districts as well as completion of the manual on Lesotho Output Monitoring System for HIV and AIDS (LOMSHA). The implementation of the National Behaviour Change and Communication's Strategy has to be accelerated. The Mid-term Review of the National HIV and AIDS Strategic Plan and the corresponding Annual Operational Plan has to be completed so as to scale-up the national response and solicit further commitments to pursue the agenda for universal access for all by 2010. Efforts to establish the HIV & AIDS Fund and intensify the resource mobilization initiatives should continue especially in the light of the global recession and dwindling support and commitments from the traditional financiers. The Draft HIV and AIDS Bill should be concluded taking into account the recent developments and SADC Model Legislation on HIV and AIDS.

In conclusion, one needs to admit that it is difficult to strike the balance between the price of past achievements and the consciousness of present short-comings. Since NAC has gone through the first phase of its operations, its review was necessary and hence proposed new leadership to take it to the next phase. Although there may be mixed feelings about my success as the CE, what I do know is that NAC has been established on a solid foundation. Any attempts to restructure the existing arrangement should be handled with care and necessary speed so as to overall the engine whilst the vehicle is in motion. It will be important to fully consult and involve management and staff so as to ensure that there is smooth transition whilst the ship remains on course.

The present success of NAC is not owed to the CE but to the Board, staff and all implementing and cooperating partners. It has to be borne in mind that the future of NAC depends as much on the present and not the past. In order to maintain and sustain current momentum, effective leadership is a key backbone to the

future success of NAC. Visionary leadership and upholding of good governance principles as bestowed in the Governance Policy and Manual would be a prerequisite for the new Board and the CE. I urge management and staff to remain intact and resolute in the mission, vision and values of NAC as well as to draw strength and inspiration from the slogan “Powered to Conquer HIV & AIDS”. Furthermore, I wish to urge the Government, Cooperating and implementing partners to support the mandate of NAC for the national response to be successful.

As a responsible citizen and for the passion and partnership I have treasured over the 4 year stint with NAC, I shall remain available for the call of duty, to support the national response and possible explore ways to enrich the partnership network on HIV & AIDS. I have learned through life that in business, there is no such thing as an invaluable person, but definitely no one is indispensable. There is therefore hope that my replacement would be somebody who is more competent, independent, a visionary leader to take NAC to the next level. It is also important that he/she should work very smart so as to maintain, sustain and build relations with all the key stakeholders.

#### **Director of Ceremonies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen**

I need to wrap-up my remarks by expressing my profound appreciation to all those who have supported me through my tenure of office with NAC. I am sure you will agree with me that I have relentlessly paid all my dues through sweat equity and sacrifice. I feel humbled that this farewell was arranged and all of you present are here to grace this momentous occasion. I have listened carefully to the words of wisdom and encouragement expressed this evening and those directly delivered to me since I jumped ship two weeks to date. Thank you for the presents which I would cherish and wear with pride. Despite challenges, I have enjoyed cooperation, collaboration and support from various partners gathered here tonight.

To management and staff, I have provided you with guidance, mentoring and coaching enough to keep the ship afloat and on course. I know that sometimes I have been too hush, impossible to please, have demanded quality and excellence, made you to work well beyond to call of duty through the third shift and managed to make enemies in the process because one can not please all. You should know that I had to take you through this gruelling experience due to the pressures and demands of the CE’s office and therefore do not take it personal. The Executive Committee and management should own-up all decisions, since I shall no longer be used as threat to demand performance from staff and buck shall not stop with me. It is therefore your choice to embrace and cherish all that you have learned through my leadership style until there is new leadership that might change and chart a new course.

I have to acknowledge the support and guidance I received from the Chairperson and the Board for the past three (3) years. I believe that management was able to provide you with the secretariat services and adequate information to enable you to make sound decisions. We had our own challenges and I am glad that we finally went through governance training and have come up with the best governance policy and manual.

I owe my sincere gratitude to the Government of Lesotho, especially the Office of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet Sub-committee on HIV and AIDS for the support I have enjoyed throughout my tenure of office. Special thanks should go to the Right Honourable the Prime Minister for being so kind to accept and give me the opportunity to serve as the 1<sup>st</sup> CE on NAC. I am sure it took a lot of courage to have entrusted me with the daunting challenge of establishing NAC and I hope I have not been a disappointment. At least this was not conveyed during our last and farewell meeting of 27 February 2009.

Last but not least, I have to thank my spouse and the family for allowing me to devote my time and serve the nation with pride. This was such a huge sacrifice given that I had to serve 24/7 and I was just literally a guest at home. Despite your frustrations, you unceremoniously had to come to terms with my new marriage partner (NAC) and equally had to compete for my attention. You never stopped your support and reduced your love to me. You remained a true friend, a faithful partner, a loving wife and have never declined to offer your shoulder to cry on when I came home sometimes with frustrations and pressures of work. More importantly, I admire you for your patience and the ability to cope with my stressful life. You have single handedly raised and provided answers to my children during my absence from home.

Finally, I owe my life, my strengths, and my success to the almighty God who never failed me as I navigated through troubled waters and was able to survive the storm. I have thus exited NAC with a sense of pride, fulfillment and achievement to pursue other options in life.

On behalf of my family and on my own behalf, I wish NAC a bright and sustainable future. I thank you all.