



Champions Take Prevention Message to Namibia

Windhoek, Namibia – On their latest mission to the southern African region, the Champions for an HIV-Free Generation congratulated Namibia on the remarkable progress made in response to HIV so far, including the quick rollout of life-saving treatment to people living with the virus.

In order to maintain these feats, the Champions stressed, the country should consider a more coordinated approach led by senior levels of government, and prevention of HIV should be made the highest priority.

“The Champions believe the good work being done by the Ministry of Health and Social Services is a shining example for the region,” His Excellency, Mr. Festus Mogae, the former president of Botswana and chairman of the Champions, said during the June 14-17 visit.

“We believe that now is the time to consider appropriate strategies in order to maintain and sustain these impressive feats.”

The visit included meetings with Namibian President Hifikepunye Pohamba, Namibia’s Founding Father, Dr. Sam Nujoma, Minister of Health and Human Services, the Hon. Dr. Richard Kamwi, other cabinet ministers, parliamentarians and leaders of civil society.

The Champions visit was part of a regional mission to exchange ideas with



Chissano, Mhavelle, Wandira and Mogae visiting a condom factory in Windhoek.

government and civil society leaders on ways to arrest the spread of HIV and AIDS in Sub Saharan Africa. More than 200,000 people are currently estimated to be living with HIV in Namibia, according to UNAIDS.

Continued on Page 6

Inside

A Real Community Champion



Page 6

ALSO:

- Champions Website Launched Page 3
- Pictures from Namibia Pages 4-5
- New Executive Secretary Page 8

The Circumcision Debate

Gaborone, Botswana — Male circumcision has been proven to reduce a man’s risk of contracting HIV by more than half. Two years after the World Health Organization recommended the surgery, several African governments like Botswana are championing the procedure and providing it to thousands of men.

Botswana has trained medical teams to do circumcisions in all its public hospitals and aims by 2016 to have circumcised 470,000 males from infancy to age 49.

“Men have started to flock to the hospitals,” Dr. Khumo Seipone, director of HIV/AIDS prevention in Botswana’s Ministry of Health, told *The New York Times*.

In Kenya, where the Luo do not generally practice circumcision, Prime Minister Raila Odinga, himself a Luo, encouraged the procedure and lobbied elders. The HIV infection rate among Luo men is more than triple that of Kenyan men generally — 17.5 percent versus 5.6 percent.

“Communities that have not been circumcising their people should go for it, but do so in hospitals where safety is assured,” Mr. Odinga told *The East African* newspaper, adding that he had been circumcised.

Despite the evidence in favor of circumcision, many southern African countries still do not provide it.

Continued on Page 7

In the News ...



Tutu Awarded Medal of Freedom

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu has dedicated his United States Presidential Medal of Freedom to all South Africans who fought for freedom and justice. "I am standing out only because millions of my compatriots are carrying me on their shoulders," he said in a statement after receiving the award from U.S. President Barack Obama at the White House on Wednesday, Aug. 12, 2009. The "extraordinary symbolism" of America's first African American president presenting the award to "a former South African township urchin," was humbling, he said. Tutu was among 16 actors, athletes, activists, scientists and humanitarians to receive

the award from Obama. The Presidential Medal of Freedom is the highest civilian award in the U.S., and is not limited to U.S. citizens or civilians. It recognizes people who have made an especially meritorious contribution to the security or national interests of the U.S., world peace, cultural or other significant public or private endeavors. The White House described Tutu as having "unflagging devotion to justice, indomitable optimism, and an unmistakable sense of humor...[and of stirring] the world's conscience for decades."

Kaunda awarded Lifetime Achievement Award

Zambia's first president Kenneth Kaunda was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award by the African Heritage Society in honour of his contribution to the liberation struggle in southern Africa. The award was presented to him July 18, 2009, at a celebration in Johannesburg. South African President Jacob Zuma's daughters presented the award to Kaunda on behalf of the African Heritage Society. Zambia's High Commissioner to South Africa, Leslie Mbula, said it was common knowledge that Zambia worked closely with

liberation movements in southern Africa, including the ANC of South Africa, and those from Zimbabwe, Namibia, Mozambique and Angola. "Dr Kaunda had insisted from the very beginning that there was no way Zambia could consider itself free when its neighbours were still under colonial domination," Mbula said. "To this end, Zambia continued to support the liberation struggle until Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia and later South Africa were finally liberated. It is pleasing that here we are now, in an independent South Africa where people of all races live together in harmony."



WHO Regional Boss Visits Champions

GABORONE, Botswana — The World Health Organization Regional Director for Africa, Dr Luis Gomes Sambo, was in Gaborone on an official visit to the Champions for HIV-Free Generation. The aim of the visit was to further strengthen collaboration between the two organizations towards the acceleration of HIV prevention in the African region.

Dr. Sambo held discussions with the Chairperson of the Champions for an HIV-Free Generation and former President of Botswana, His Excellency, Mr. Festus G.



Dr. Sambo held discussions with the Champions' Chairman during a visit to Gaborone in August. Photo courtesy of WHO.

Mogae. Key issues included the need for continued WHO support to the Champions, and the need to sensitize other Afri-

can governments and development partners to strengthen the multi-sectoral response to HIV and AIDS in accordance with the spirit of the Maputo Regional Committee meeting of 2005.

The discussions also focused on exploring synergies among other health and development stakeholders in the area of HIV prevention, Mobilization of media and public support towards HIV prevention interventions and on mechanisms to further strengthen collaboration between the two organizations.



WWW.HIVFREECHAMPIONS.ORG



CHAMPIONS CHAIRMAN LAUNCHES NEW WEBSITE

GABORONE, Botswana – His Excellency, Mr. Festus G. Mogae, the former president of Botswana and champion of HIV prevention issues in Africa, announced the launch of a new website — www.hivfreechampions.org — designed to encourage renewed leadership in the response to the epidemic in Sub Saharan Africa.

Mogae is the chairperson of the **Champions for an HIV-Free Generation**, a group of former heads of state and government and other influential African personalities who are calling on the their peers to rethink and step up efforts to prevent the spread of HIV in the region.

The website, launched on July 10, highlights the Champions’ activities as they cross southern Africa to meet with sitting heads of state and government, prime ministers, health ministers, leaders of civil society and the media.

“AIDS represents one of the greatest leadership challenges of our time. But who is leading the charge in Sub Saharan Africa?” Mogae asked. “Now more than ever we need Champions to fill the leadership void. Our purpose is to meet with regional leaders as Afri-

cans and share ideas for an accelerated response to the epidemic. This website will help track our progress as we carry out our business across the region.”

Visitors to the website will find:

- * Profiles of the Champions
- * Latest news on country visits and other activities
- * Videos, photos, newsletters and other documents
- * HIV and AIDS Resources
- * Leadership Resources
- * Secretariat Information
- * Chance to ask questions and make recommendations

The website highlights Champions’ activities, including the Inaugural Meeting in Botswana, participation at the International Conference on AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections in Africa (ICASA), and country visits to Mozambique and Namibia.

Photos from Namibia Country Visit



Photo Captions (clockwise): 1) H.E. Joaquim Chissano meets with Namibia Founding Father Sam Nujoma; 2) Namibian President Hifikepunge Pohamba greets the Champions outside his office in Windhoek; 3) H.E. Festus Mogae with Namibian Minister of Health Dr. Richard Kamwi; 4) Ms. Joyce Mhaville with various cabinet ministers; 5) Champions holding press conference in the Namibian State House.



Photo Captions (clockwise): 1) Dr. Speciosa Wandira talks to key cabinet ministers; 2) Condoms are tested at a factory visited by the Champions in Windhoek; 3) Mogae following a meeting with civil society; 4) Champions visit to a mobile HIV testing center stationed outside Namibian Breweries; 5) Chissano in the famous Constitution Room during a meeting with parliamentarians; 6) At a luncheon for Ambassadors and development partners; 7) Ms. Joyce Mends-Cole welcomes guests to the Ambassador's luncheon.

Venancius Rukero: A Real Community Champion

Windhoek, Namibia — Venancius Rukero, a former street child who faced rejection because of his HIV status, has built an orphanage from the ruins of an abandoned brothel in Windhoek.

“I felt I had to do something for these kids because I know where they are coming from.”

Rukero ran away from home when he was nine and roamed the streets of Windhoek, washing cars and turning to prostitution for money. A few years later he was diagnosed with HIV.

“I was diagnosed with HIV when I was 17 years old. My plan was to commit suicide, but luckily I never did. I was scared.”

At the time, Rukero was living with a pastor and his family. When he disclosed his status to them, he was asked to leave the house.

“The pastor’s wife said that from now on we can no longer use the same cutlery or the same bath room. The pastor himself said the best option was for me to just leave the house,” Rukero says,

“I was in shock. I was feeling I don’t deserve to live anymore. That day I almost ran into the cars on the highway, but again, for the second time, I didn’t commit suicide.”

It was his own experience on the streets that led Rukero to dream of doing something for young people affected by HIV. After attending an international AIDS conference in Bangkok, he was inspired to open the orphanage.

With a house provided by the City of Windhoek and funds from the Icelandic Embassy, he followed his dream. The **Venancius Rukero Orphan and Vulnerable Children Foundation** now supports more than 30 orphans with shelter, food and back-to-school programs.

“I’ve been on ARV treatment since 2004, but these kids are also boosting my immune system with the love they are giving me. They make me very strong and dynamic,” he says.

The Champions for an HIV-Free Generation had the pleasure of meeting Rukero during their June country visit to Namibia.



“My advice for anyone facing stigma and discrimination is not to put yourself down, but to come out of the closet and face life, I look back and and say to myself, ‘If I had taken my own life who was supposed to look after all of these orphans?’”

Rukero’s story of overcoming great odds and adversity was an awe inspiring moment on the Champions’ tour. His devotion to the children of Windhoek embodies what it means to be a real “Community Champion.”

Champions Take Message to Namibia, Cont...

...Continued from page 1

In addition to Mr. Mogae, other Champions taking part in the visit included His Excellency, **Mr. Joaquim Chissano**, former president of the Republic of Mozambique; **Dr. Speciosa Wandira**, former vice president of Uganda; and **Ms. Joyce Mhville**, chairperson of the Steering Committee of the African Broadcast Media Partnership Against HIV/AIDS (ABMP).

During their second country visit this year (the first visit was to Mozambique in February), the Champions also emphasized that HIV prevention must take priority over other programs. They recommended that a recently drafted policy on **male circumcision** in Namibia be endorsed by leadership and rolled out with urgency.

The mission also held discussions on the sustainability of health programs, which

will require a resourcing strategy and an increased commitment from domestic sources in coming years.

“In the current world economic crisis, there is a need for all of us – each and every country in Africa – to assume responsibility and deal with this pandemic

“Our leaders should take every opportunity to speak out against stigma and endorse laws and policies that create a social environment that cares for people living with HIV .”

— Champion Joyce Mhville

from the resources we have within,” Chissano told a gathering of 12 cabinet ministers.

The delegation’s visit included a field trip

to a condom factory and a mobile health clinic stationed outside of Namibian Breweries to service its employees. The Champions met with gender and youth groups, as well as the media, to discuss their role in the response to HIV and ways to improve coordination.

The Champions acknowledged Namibia for making great strides in addressing stigma, and praised the government for removing travel restrictions against people living with HIV from entering the country. But some harmful practices remain, they said, including the denial of home loans for people who test positive for HIV.

“Our leaders should take every opportunity to speak out against stigma and endorse laws and policies that create a social environment that cares for people living with HIV,” Mhville said.



The Debate Over Male Circumcision, cont...

... Continued from Page 1

The demand for male circumcision is there, so is the evidence that it can work, but staff shortages and constraints in local health systems are slowing down implementation.

Following a visit to Mozambique in February by the Champions for an HIV-Free Generation, the Ministry of Health said cultural diversity and surgery capacity posed challenges for Mozambique in scaling up the practice.

The Health Minister, Dr. Ivo Garrido, told reporters after the Champions' visit that circumcision "is not the solution for AIDS in Mozambique."

"Circumcision is a practice advocated by some religions, such as Islam," Garrido told reporters. "There are groups which, because of their traditions, advise circumcision. But there are other groups who don't accept this practice."

In South Africa, a policy on male circumcision is being mulled by the government. But newspapers report that such a policy is being resisted by traditional leaders, who insist that circumcision is a customary, not a health, procedure.

A draft policy in South Africa recommends that the government launch male circumcision in KwaZulu-Natal — the province with the highest HIV infection (39 percent), but also the lowest male circumcision rate. It will then be expanded to a further 17 districts.

However, Patekile Holomisa, acting chairperson of the Congress of Traditional

Leaders, has insisted that male circumcision is a "religious matter."

"We can't allow it to be used for other purposes such as a reduction of HIV infection rates," he told the *Mail & Guardian* newspaper.

In the meantime, demand for the surgery in South Africa has surged over the last year. Thousands of young men have flocked to the Orange Farm clinic near Johannesburg for the free procedure.

In Botswana, one local tribe has resumed an initiation ceremony — once discouraged by Christian missionaries — where young men are circumcised as part of a "coming of age" ritual.

"I've done 53 (circumcisions) in a seven-hour day, me, myself, personally," Dr. Dino Rech, who helped design the clinic, told *The New York Times*.

Men who come to Orange Farm clinic are counseled to continue using condoms since circumcision provides partial, though substantial protection.

Men waiting outside the clinic on a recent morning in July said they were hoping the procedure would help them stay healthy. But some said they were also drawn by another motivation: They had heard from recently circumcised friends that it makes for better sex. You last longer, they said, and your lovers think you're cleaner and more exciting in bed.

"My girlfriend was nagging me about this,

so I was like, 'OK, let me do it,'" one 24-year-old man told the newspaper.

Despite the challenges of implementing such a politically and culturally controversial policy, some countries are showing that it can be done.

In Botswana, circumcision was largely stopped in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by British colonial-era administrators and Christian missionaries. But Mr. Festus Mogae, who was president from 1998 to 2008, provided a critical endorsement of male circumcision just before he stepped down from office.

Today, public awareness is being raised through advertisements on radio, television and billboards. Also, at least one Botswana tribe has resumed initiation ceremonies where young men are circumcised as part of a "coming of age" ritual. Around 1,500 males went through the traditional custom in August.

Meanwhile, Mr. Mogae continues to champion circumcision as chairman and founder of the Champions for an HIV-Free Generation.

"Male circumcision is one of the priority areas for the Champions because we believe in the evidence that it helps to reduce the chances of HIV transmission in heterosexual men by as much as 65 percent," Mogae said recently at the opening of the WHO regional committee meeting in Rwanda. "Male circumcision, if implemented, could prevent an estimated two million infections in the southern African region over the next 10 years."

Interim Executive Secretary Appointed



Mr. Serwalo S.G. Tumelo

GABORONE, Botswana – Mr. Serwalo S.G. Tumelo, former Permanent Secretary of the Botswana Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, has been appointed on an interim basis to lead the Champions' Secretariat in charge of staff and opera-

tions.

Mr. Tumelo will serve for three months—from Aug. 31 to Nov. 30 — until a new permanent Executive Secretary is chosen to oversee the Secretariat office. Mr. Tumelo assumes the duties of former Executive Secretary, Dr. Kereng Masupu, who has completed his one-year assignment.

Mr. Tumelo has worked 31 years in public service in Botswana. He left his post as Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning on Dec. 31, 2008, after 10 years. He previously spent two years as Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture.

Mr. Tumelo has served as director to in-

ternational companies like De Beers SA and De Beers Consolidated Mines. He has also headed numerous local boards, including the Bank of Botswana and Botswana Development Corporation. Earlier this year, he was appointed chairman of African Alliance Botswana, an investment management firm in Gaborone.

"I feel privileged to lead the Champions' Secretariat as we prepare for a new Executive Secretary," Mr. Tumelo said. "During this transitional period we will continue to move forward to guide and support our regional leaders in the response to HIV and AIDS."

WHO WE ARE



Champions for an HIV-Free Generation was launched at the 17th International AIDS Conference in Mexico City. Led by His Excellency, Mr. Festus Mogae, the former president of Botswana, the founding members include four former African presidents, a Nobel Laureate, and other high-level African leaders from different walks of life.

With an emphasis on proven HIV prevention practices, the Champions embrace and promote key policy, legal, cultural and behavioral practices and messages that help accelerate the social outcomes needed to achieve an HIV-free generation.

For more information visit our website at www.hivfreechampions.org
Or contact: Doug Johnson at +267 391-4078



Mogae



Kaunda



Mkapa



Chissano



Wandira



Tutu



Cameron



Were



Kebede



Mhaville

Our Partners

