Zuma Delivers Historic AIDS Speech from allafrica.com

In what has been described as the final death of state sponsored AIDS denialism, President Jacob Zuma has delivered a historic speech in the National Council of Provinces acknowledging that the country was not winning the war against the disease and that extraordinary measures were needed. The speech is below:

ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA, HE MR JACOB ZUMA, TO THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF PROVINCES (NCOP)

NCOP CHAMBER, CAPE TOWN

29 OCTOBER 2009

The Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces, Honourable Mninawa Mahlangu;

Deputy Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces, Honourable Thandi Memela;

Provincial Premiers;

Members of Parliament;

Representatives of the South African Local Government Association,

Distinguished guests;

Ladies and gentlemen;

The National Council of Provinces occupies a unique and a special place in our democracy.

The Constitution charges the NCOP to represent the provinces in order to "ensure that provincial interests are taken into account in the national sphere of government".

This chamber has to perform this important function by mainly participating in the national legislative process and by providing a national forum for public consideration of issues affecting the provinces.

The Constitution says that representatives of local government may also participate in the proceedings of the NCOP when the need arises.

The NCOP therefore is the meeting point of the three spheres of government.

It is a forum where the elected representatives of our people should jointly discuss the major issues facing our republic and its citizens.

Chairperson, Honourable Members,

Our young democracy faces significant challenges.

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Though we have achieved much, there is much more that we need to do.

Just as we cannot allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by these challenges, we dare not underesti-
mate them.

If we are to build the thriving nation for which we have worked so hard, and for which so many have
sacrificed so much, we need to appreciate the extent and nature of these challenges.

I would like to highlight two critical challenges, both of which, in different ways, have the potential
to undermine our efforts to achieve a better life for our people.

The first of these challenges relates to our economy.

The global economy is going through a major economic crisis.

The impact of this crisis has been felt by every section of our society.

Businesses, both big and small, have been closed.

Thousands of workers have lost their jobs.

As more families lose their livelihoods and businesses risk collapse, they look to government for
assistance.

And yet government’s ability to assist has been weakened.

As the Minister of Finance indicated in his address to the National Assembly on Tuesday, govern-
ment revenues are down and the budget deficit is up.

Our ability to assist those in need has been placed under strain.

With fewer funds available, we nevertheless need to provide health care to the sick, education to our
youth, and social grants to the most vulnerable in our society.

Our challenges compel us to do more with less.

We have to ensure that limited public resources are spent on those things that serve a greater pub-
lic good.

The Medium Term Budget Policy Statement that Minister Gordhan presented this week underscores
this imperative.

It presents a spending programme that places the interests of ordinary South Africans - particularly
the poor and vulnerable - at the centre of government’s work.

It recognises that we will need to borrow more to meet our needs.

We are determined, however, to contain our borrowing requirement within sustainable limits, to
ensure that we do not burden future generations with our debt.

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Chairperson, Honourable Members,

We are facing arguably our greatest economic challenge since the advent of democracy.

We do so against the backdrop of a global recession not of our making, and in an economic and social environment still dominated by the distortions of our apartheid past.

South Africa has long been plagued by structural unemployment, with the result that a sizable portion of our population has been without work for many years.

Many of our people do not have the skills needed to find employment.

Though it absorbs a significant amount of our budget, our education system does not produce the outcomes we require.

Apartheid planning continues to have a significant impact on poor people living in both rural and urban areas.

The lack of basic infrastructure in these areas, and their location far from economic centres, severely limits opportunities for millions of our people.

These are among the challenges we face.

We need to recognise them and properly understand them.

For only then, can we ensure that we respond appropriately.

Chairperson, Honourable Members,

It is our firm belief that indeed this government is responding appropriately to these challenges.

The steps we need to take to respond to the recession cannot be separated from the longer term task of transforming our economy and society.

That is why we borrow not to bail out banks and failing businesses, but to invest in economic infrastructure, education, health care, rural development and the fight against crime.

That is why we see in this recession an opportunity to improve the operation of government and ensure that it better utilises scarce resources.

That is a task in which we would like to see this National Council playing a prominent role.

We have created new departments and reformed others in order to focus on the important priorities on which our people expect us to deliver.

I would mention in particular the establishment of the new Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, which replaced the former Department of Provincial and Local Government.

The change in the name is more than cosmetic.

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It draws attention to the role that we think this new department should play.

Chapter 3 of the Constitution of the Republic enjoins all spheres of government to cooperate with one another in mutual trust and good faith by fostering friendly relations; assisting and supporting one another; consulting one another on matters of common interest; and coordinating their actions and legislation with one another.

The experience of the last fifteen years of our democracy has taught us that the three spheres of government have not always lived up to these constitutional injunctions.

More often than not, the three spheres of government pull in different directions.

Their actions are not coordinated.

We have therefore established this new department to assist us to ensure that government works in a cooperative and coordinated fashion.

I ask for your support and assistance to make sure that this department and all other departments meet their mandates.

In that way, we can use this crisis to ensure that our three spheres of government work better together to improve people's lives.

Though we may be buffeted by the uncertain winds of the global economy, we are not helpless.

Working together, determined that our common national programme should succeed, we can and will weather this particular storm.

Chairperson, Honourable Members,

The second challenge that I wish to highlight is no less grave.

Indeed, if we do not respond with urgency and resolve, we may well find our vision of a thriving nation slipping from our grasp.

Recent statistics from the Department of Health, Human Sciences Research Council, Medical Research Council, Statistics SA and other sources paint a disturbing picture of the health of our nation.

They show that nearly 6 out of 10 deaths in our country in 2006 were deaths of people younger than 50 years.

If we consider mortality trends over the last decade, we see that the age at which people die has been changing dramatically.

More and more people are dying young, threatening even to outnumber in proportional terms those who die in old age.

Honourable Members, South Africans are dying at an increasing rate.

The number of deaths registered in 2008 jumped to 756,000, up from 573,000 the year before.

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At this rate, there is a real danger that the number of deaths will soon overtake the number of births. The births registered during this period were one million two hundred and five thousand one hundred and eleven (1,205,111).

The Independent Electoral Commission had to remove 396,336 deceased voters from the Voters Roll during September last year and August this year.

What is even more disturbing is the number of young women who are dying in the prime of their life, in their child-bearing years.

In 2006, life expectancy at birth for South African men was estimated to be 51 years.

By contrast, life expectancy in Algeria was 70 years and 60 years in Senegal.

These are some of the chilling statistics that demonstrate the devastating impact that HIV and AIDS is having on our nation.

Not even the youngest are spared.

Some studies suggest that 57% of the deaths of children under the age of five during 2007 were as a result of HIV.

This situation is aggravated by the high tuberculosis prevalence.

The co-infection rate between HIV and TB has now reached a staggering 73%.

Statistics indicate that the numbers of citizens with TB number at 481,584.

These statistics do not, however, fully reveal the human toll of the disease.

It is necessary to go into the hospitals, clinics and hospices of our country to see the effects of HIV and AIDS on those who should be in the prime of their lives.

It is necessary to go into people's homes to see how families struggle with the triple burden of poverty, disease and stigma.

Wherever you go across the country, you hear people lament the apparent frequency with which they have to bury family members and friends.

To access this speech online, go to: http://allafrica.com/stories/200910300233.html

For more stories surrounding Zuma’s AIDS speech:

- Zuma Rallies S. Africa to Fight AIDS from the New York Times
- Zuma Calls For Renewed Effort In Fight Against HIV/AIDS from the Kaiser Family Foundation
- President heralds new era in South Africa’s AIDS response from UNAIDS
Nigeria: BBC Partners National Media on HIV/Aids from allafrica.com

Makurdi — The British Broadcasting Corporation World Service Trust (BBCWST) has pledged to partner state governments and the media in Nigeria through its Enhancing Nigerians Response to HIV/AIDS (ENR) program, to fight the HIV/AIDS scourge in the country.

According to the coordinator of the program, Mrs. Helen Bassey, who spoke at a one-day sensitisation workshop for media men in Makurdi, the ENR program is a six-year program expected to span 2009-2016. She stressed that the ENR programme is aimed at curtailting the spread of HIV/AIDS in developing countries of the world which, according to her, is also in tandem with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Bassey intimated that the BBCWST is working in seven states of the Federation, which includes Benue, Cross River, Nasarawa, Kaduna, Lagos, Ogun and Akwa Ibom states.

She emphasised that the organisation would partner with state governments through their various State Action Committees on HIV/AIDS and the media to raise the consciousness of the people on the dangers of the disease.

Helen stated that the overall goal of the workshop was to establish a media committee network in Benue that would formulate action plans to stem the spread of the disease in the state.

To access this article online, go to http://allafrica.com/stories/200911021556.html

U.S. Officially Ends Travel Ban from the Kaiser Family Foundation

The White House on Friday announced an end to a 22-year-old travel ban on HIV-positive foreigners visiting the U.S. or seeking residency, the New York Times reports. The newspaper writes that President Barack Obama announced that a rule canceling the ban would be published on Monday and would take effect after a routine 60-day waiting period” (Preston, 10/30).

According to The Hill, Obama said, "We talk about reducing the stigma of this disease, yet we’ve treated a visitor living with it as a threat. If we want to be the global leader in combating HIV/AIDS, we need to act like it” (Zimmerman, 10/30). The Associated Press/Philadelphia Inquirer reports that “[t]he law effectively has kept out thousands of students, tourists, and refugees and has complicated the adoption of children with HIV” (Superville, 10/31).

According to Agence France-Press, "Obama's predecessor, [President] George W. Bush, signed legislation last year that removed HIV from a list of diseases 'of public health significance' that effectively barred any person infected with HIV from entering the United States." The rule announced by Obama on Friday implemented the law.

U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon lauded the move: "I urge all other countries with such restrictions to take steps to remove them at the earliest." According to AFP, "Ban has made the lifting of stigma and discrimination connected with AIDS a personal mission, first calling on countries to lift their travel restrictions in 2008 at a UN meeting on the disease" (11/1).

The New York Times reports: "International health officials said lifting the ban would end a much-criticized inconsistency in United States health policy, with Washington playing a leading role in AIDS prevention in Africa and other countries with severe epidemics, but preserving restrictions that in practice prevented international AIDS researchers and activists from gathering at conferences" in the U.S. (10/30).

To access this article online, go to http://globalhealth.kff.org/Daily-Reports/2009/November/02/GH-110209-HIV-Travel.aspx

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For earlier issues of the REACH newsletter, please visit the REACH website: http://www.cics.northwestern.edu/projects/reach/

REACH is a collaborative program of Northwestern University and the University of Ibadan with the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. REACH aims to improve HIV/AIDS prevention strategies in Nigeria through social science and community-based research.