

**ADDRESS BY DEPUTY PRESIDENT THABO MBEKI**

**DECLARATION OF PARTNERSHIP AGAINST AIDS**

Friday, 9 October 1998

President Mandela has asked me to address you on his behalf. I am honoured to be able to do so.

**DECLARATION**

HIV/AIDS is among us.

It is real. It is spreading

We can only win against HIV/AIDS if we join hands to save our nation.

For too long we have closed our eyes as a nation, hoping the truth was not so real.

For many years, we have allowed the HI Virus to spread, and at a rate in our country which is one of the fastest in the world.

Every single day a further 1 500 people in South Africa get infected. To date, more than 3 million people have been infected.

**THE DANGER IS REAL**

Many more face the danger of being affected by HIV/AIDS.

Because it is carried and communicated by other human beings, it is with us in our work places, in our classrooms and our lecture halls.

It is there in our church gatherings and other religious functions.

HIV/AIDS walks with us. It travels with us wherever we go. It is there when we play sport. It is there when we sing and dance.

Many of us have grieved for orphans left with no one to fend for them. We have experienced AIDS in the groans of wasting lives. We have carried it in small and big coffins to many graveyards.

At times we did not know that we were burying AIDS victims. At other time we knew, but chose to remain silent.

And when the time comes for each one of us to make a personal precautionary decision, we fall prey to doubt and false confidence. We hope that HIV/AIDS is someone else's problem.

**CHANGING OUR WAY OF LIFE**

HIV/AIDS is not someone else's problem. It is my problem. It is your problem.

By allowing it to spread, we face the danger that half of our youth will not reach adulthood. Their education will be wasted. The economy will shrink. There will be a large number of sick people whom the healthy will not be able to maintain. Our dreams as a people will be shattered.

HIV spreads mainly through sex.

You have the right to live your life the way you want to.

But I appeal to the young people, who represent our country's future, to abstain from sex for as long as possible. If you decide to engage in sex, use a condom.

In the same way, I appeal to both men and women to be faithful to each other, but otherwise to use condoms.

## **PARTNERSHIP**

The power to defeat the spread of HIV and AIDS lies in our Partnership - as youth, as women and men, as business people, as workers, as religious people, as parents and teachers, as students, as healers, as farmers and farm workers, at the unemployed and the professionals, as the rich and the poor - in fact, all of us.

Today, we join hands in this Partnership Against HIV/AIDS, united in our resolve to save the nation.

As Partners Against AIDS, together we pledge to spread the message!

Everyday every night - wherever we are - we shall let our families, friends and peers know that they can save themselves and save the nation, by changing the way we live and how we love. We shall use every opportunity openly to discuss the issue of AIDS.

As Partners Against AIDS, together we pledge to care!

We shall work together to care for those living with HIV/AIDS and for the orphans. They must not be subjected to discrimination of any kind. They can live productive lives for many years.

They are human beings like you and me. When we lend a hand, we build our own humanity, and when we remind ourselves that, like them, each one of us can become infected.

As Partners Against AIDS, together we pledge to pool our resources and to commit our brain power!

There is still no cure for HIV and AIDS. Nothing can prevent infection except our own behaviour.

We shall work together to support medical institutions to search for a vaccine and a cure. We shall mobilise all possible resources to spread the message of prevention, to offer support to those infected and affected, to destigmatise HIV and AIDS and to continue our search for a medical solution.

And so today we join hands in the Partnership, fully aware that our unity is our strength. The simple but practical action that we take today is tomorrow's insurance for our nation.

Accordingly, we pledge that wherever we meet and study, work and sing, play and enjoy one another's company, we will protect ourselves and our partners against HIV and AIDS.

Together, as Partners Against HIV/AIDS, we can and shall win.

I have asked for your time to listen to this urgent message because there is no other moment but the present, to take action.

I thank you for your attention and urge you to act NOW!