

PRESS STATEMENT

UNAIDS is deeply saddened by the death of His Majesty King Goodwill Zwelithini of the Zulu nation

GENEVA, 17 March 2021—UNAIDS is saddened by the news that His Majesty King Goodwill Zwelithini has died and conveys its sincerest condolences to the Zulu royal family and to the wider Zulu nation.

“King Zwelithini was a change agent in South Africa’s AIDS response and encouraged his people to become actively engaged in reducing the impact of HIV in KwaZulu-Natal,” said UNAIDS Executive Director, Winnie Byanyima. “The King will be sorely missed both as a visionary leader and as a powerful and tireless advocate for people living with and affected by HIV.”

In 2009, King Zwelithini revived the practice of voluntary medical male circumcision (VMMC) among young Zulu men to help reduce the transmission of HIV. As a result of his leadership, KwaZulu-Natal, which has the highest prevalence of HIV in South Africa, has become a flagship for the effectiveness of VMMC as part of a combination of HIV prevention tools. The King was also a renowned advocate for people living with and affected by tuberculosis and stressed the need for community engagement to tackle difficult health issues, including HIV and tuberculosis.

In 2012, King Zwelithini spoke of the need for honesty between parents and their children in confronting the issues surrounding HIV prevention. “It is not easy, but we should speak the truth, because the love of truth is the spirit of men.”

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UNAIDS

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) leads and inspires the world to achieve its shared vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. UNAIDS unites the efforts of 11 UN organizations—UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, UN Women, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank—and works closely with global and national partners towards ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals. Learn more at unaids.org and connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.