

Speech

*[Note: e.g. Check against delivery]*

## **World AIDS Day event**

**Durban, 1 December 2008**

**Speech by  
Peter Piot,  
UNAIDS Executive Director**

Deputy President. Ms Baleka Mbete  
Minister of Health, Ms Barbara Hogan and other Ministers of State Present  
Deputy Ministers  
The Premier of KwaZulu Natal Province Mr S'bu Ndebele  
Members of Parliament  
Mayor of I-theweni  
Members of the National and Provincial AIDS Councils.

San' bonani. Ninjani?

My friends - it is an honour and a pleasure to be with you here in Durban on World AIDS Day.

We are here because we have reasons to celebrate and causes for concern

Last time I spoke in this stadium was in 2000, at the 13<sup>th</sup> International AIDS Conference. I will never forget seeing small, frail Nkosi Johnson standing on this stage, nor the bold words he spoke.

Nkosi said he wished the government would give antiretroviral drugs to pregnant women so other children wouldn't suffer as he did. We are here to celebrate that Nkosi's wish is beginning to come true. Even if it's too late for him and hundreds of thousands of other children

I was one of those calling for access to antiretroviral treatment. Some people said it would never happen – that it *could* never happen.

It took a long time and a lot of hard work. But we have proved them wrong. Country by country. Now, finally, more than half a million people in South Africa are alive and well because they're getting antiretroviral therapy.

This is another fact to celebrate.

But there is no cause for complacency. Many, many concerns remain.

Some 5.7 million people are living with HIV in South Africa. Eventually, they will all need treatment. And new infections continue to occur faster than we can put people on treatment.

We are here today because we know we need to do more.

Especially in terms of HIV prevention.

Indeed, one of the biggest challenges we face today is to get HIV prevention to everyone who needs it.

Wherever they live, and whoever they are. Male and female, young and old. Gay and straight. And specifically pregnant women, young girls, migrants, prisoners and drug users.

This means a lot more hard work. It means passing and implementing laws to secure human rights. It means eliminating homophobia and gender inequalities.

It means a mass movement to *prevent* HIV.

At the same time, hundreds of people die of TB every day. We have people here in KwaZulu Natal living with HIV, but dying of TB. This shouldn't happen. It needn't happen.

We must move faster to fight tuberculosis and HIV together.

We must strengthen the health workforce and improve health services in general.

None of this is easy. But the recent past has shown what people in South Africa can achieve when they come together.

I am proud to be here in South Africa today and to see government and civil society joining forces to defeat this epidemic. I am encouraged by the leadership the National AIDS Council is providing.

For believe me, when we work together, we can move mountains.

In the words of the great Miriam Makeba: We got to unite mama.

Siyabonga.