

## **Namibia commended for HIV/AIDS efforts at International AIDS Conference**

**27 July, Amsterdam:** Namibia was recognised at the 22<sup>nd</sup> International AIDS Conference for its progress and achievements towards the Fast Track targets and the ultimate goal to End AIDS by 2030. The conference, which took place from 23- 27 July in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, brought together key health stakeholders from across the globe to share scientific research and programmatic lessons related to the HIV and AIDS response.

The United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) awarded Namibia "Best Progress at the halfway-point in pursuit of the 2020 Fast Track goals" and for "Best efforts cultivating the potential of local and indigenous partners".

Namibia is nearing the achievement of 90-90-90 and can become the first country in Africa to do so. A recent survey, the Namibia Population-based HIV Impact Assessment (NAMPHIA), shows that Namibia has 86% of People Living with HIV (PLHIV) who know their HIV status, 96% of PLHIV who know their status are on treatment, and 91% of PLHIV on treatment are virally suppressed (meaning that the virus is undetectable and thus untransmittable). Data from the recently released UNAIDS global report "Miles to Go" shows that global progress is at 75-79-81.

Speaking at the conference, the Minister of Health and Social Services, Dr. Bernhard Haufiku, highlighted that an AIDS free generation in Namibia is in reach. He said, "We are on track to control the HIV epidemic with our HIV treatment and prevention programmes. The suppression of the virus is a marker of effective treatment and will help us with prevention because, as we all know, treatment by itself is prevention."

Commending Namibia's efforts, the UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibé said, "Namibia's concerted efforts to reach people with HIV testing and treatment are producing extraordinary results." He further recommitted UNAIDS' support towards Namibia in reaching all people living with HIV with testing as well as with boosting prevention efforts to further reduce new infections.

One of Namibia's many notable initiatives is the First Lady of the Republic of Namibia (FLON), Madame Monica Geingos' #BeFree Campaign. FLON, who is the UNAIDS Special Advocate for Young Women and Adolescent Girls, provides a platform across Namibia where adolescents can come together to share their lived experiences and gain the information, knowledge and tools needed to transition into adulthood. This includes information about sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

FLON participated throughout the International AIDS Conference and used her platform to continue championing the Start Free, Stay Free, AIDS Free Agenda, challenging participants to tackle the societal inequalities leaving adolescent girls behind. "Adolescent girls will be exposed to HIV as long as economic inequities exist in our countries," she said, noting that adolescent girls and young women remain disproportionately affected by HIV due to transactional sex with older men.

Moving forward towards ending the AIDS epidemic, partners will continue to focus on building and strengthening the multi-sectoral response, including through increasing comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and engaging with key populations, including men-who-have-sex-with-men and sex workers. The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, Hon. Sanet Steenkamp, emphasised the importance of CSE as a component to HIV prevention during a panel discussion at the conference.

With access to information, adolescents can be empowered to take prevention of HIV into their own hands. A report launched by UNICEF and UNAIDS at the conference, "All In, in Eastern and Southern Africa: Catalysing the HIV response for adolescents", reiterated this as well as demonstrated the

importance of the meaningful and active engagement of adolescents throughout all levels of HIV/ AIDS response.

UN Namibia was represented at the International AIDS Conference by UNAIDS, UNFPA and UNICEF.



*UN Namibia's Dennia Gayle (UNFPA) and Dr. Tharcisse Barihuta (UNAIDS), join FLON for a picture with UNAIDS Leadership, Directors and staff. UNAIDS*