

The First Lady of Namibia at the 70th World Health Assembly

UNAIDS Namibia: The Executive Director of UNAIDS, Mr. Michel Sidibé, invited the First Lady of Namibia, Madame Monica Geingos, to attend the World Health Assembly in Geneva, Switzerland in her capacity as UNAIDS Special Advocate for Young Women and Adolescent Girls, during his recent mission to Namibia in April.



On 23 May the First Lady took part in a special Town Hall for UNAIDS staff and young people where she spoke about her work as UNAIDS Special Advocate for Young Women and Adolescent Girls and her own #BeFree campaign modelled on the Stay Free Stay Free AIDS Free initiative. The First Lady also spoke about what motivates her and the challenges of reaching young people and their parents with positive messages about their health and wellbeing.

In an engaging town hall style, FLON responded to questions from the moderator on what motivated the #BeFree Movement and how it complemented the Stay Free and Start Free agenda. The room was packed to capacity and the participants used the opportunity to engage FLON on the lessons learnt and how organisations and projects run by the youth can be mainstreamed and funded.

FLON agreed that those in leadership need to take better guidance from youth about the type of services the youth need and how they want to receive them. "We need more guidance from young people about what services they want and how they want to receive them," said FLON.

She also advised the youth to be mindful that funding will always remain a challenge and they also had an obligation to find creative and cost-effective ways to implement projects in a way that they can have a track record to reference and evidence of effectiveness. This would enable more constructive dialogue about funding potential as their proposal will be evidence based.

In explaining the motivation behind #BeFree, FLON spoke to the work of her office to simplify and translate the UNAIDS #StartFree, Stay Free, AIDS Free Agenda into something that resonated with helping young people to self-actualise.

On being asked what her hopes and fears for young people are, she explained that her hopes and fears for millennials are the same hopes and fears she has for her own children as young

people face structural barriers as well as barriers that they sometimes place in their own way. Her hopes were that young people overcome their personal barriers and fears are that despite doing the hard work of overcoming their personal limitations, they remain trapped in the structural barriers.

This led into a discussion on how the #BeFree Movement strives to help young people deal with everything that holds them back from reaching their potential and has proved to be a great entry point into having frank dialogue with youth about issues they would not ordinarily engage on.

FLON shared the story of Anonymous #BeFree who has disclosed her HIV Status to her Office and was able to reach services through direct engagement with her. This is an example of how her Office works as a bridge builder to respond to meet the needs of young people in Namibia. FLON also spoke to the need to entrench the values of acceptance, human rights and equality of key populations to end AIDS.

UNAIDS Executive Director, Michel Sidibé hailed FLON as a champion of young people's issues and reaffirmed his commitment to support her work.

"The science is important & the numbers are important. But we must communicate with young people in their language" – Madame Monica Geingos.

"No information and false information are the biggest threats to health in Namibia"- Madame Monica Geingos.