

## **WANTED: Leaders for a TB Free Namibia**

The Ministry of Health and Social Services, in partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other partners joined the rest of the world calling on leaders to end tuberculosis (TB). TB can be prevented and treated, but continues to affect and kill many people around the globe.



The Minister of Health and Social Services, Honorable Dr. Bernhard Haufiku addressed the importance of leadership at all levels when tackling TB in his key note address at the commemoration of World TB Day, “We know what causes TB, we know how to prevent TB, we know what treatment to provide, but why is it that we continue to be overwhelmed by TB? Leadership is not only political; it can be in a pre-school, in your community, in your work place or even in prison. We need to take personal responsibility and leadership to end TB”.

He further alluded to socioeconomic conditions and personal risk factors that increase vulnerability to TB infections, such as lack of proper housing, unemployment and poor sanitation as well smoking tobacco products and harmful use of alcohol. He called on the community to take care of personal hygiene to prevent TB, and concluded the speech by highlighting the main symptoms of TB and importance of early detection and treatment.

Dr. Mary Brantuo, speaking on behalf of WHO Namibia, said, “A TB-free world will only be achieved through leaders who champion efforts to end TB at the local level. Leaders have tremendous influence to build strong partnerships and commitment to end the TB epidemic at every level.”

She further called upon governments to increase domestic funding for TB control and to take responsibility for essential medicines and laboratory supplies. She commended the Namibian government for increasing funding for TB over 15-fold in the past 10 years.

*“As the country works towards the ambitious goals of the End TB Strategy, WHO will continue to provide technical assistance at all stages of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluating of the interventions to ensure we work together to achieve a TB free world,”* Dr Brantuo concluded her remarks.

A TB survivor, Mrs. Karin Husselman, also spoke at the occasion; *“I stand before you today as an individual, a mother, pastor’s wife, nurse but also as a former TB patient”*. She gave testimony

of how she was diagnosed with TB. Although she experienced the symptoms, she ignored the possibility of them linking her to a potentially life threatening disease. She was diagnosed while on holiday with her family in Cape Town and had to be isolated, and was unable to return home for a couple of weeks. She called on health workers to take extra care about early detection of TB in patients. She addressed the stigma attached to TB, and that it was not a disease of the poor or black, but could affect anyone, irrespective of race and social status. Mrs. Husselman emphasized the importance of treatment adherence and completion of treatment.

Various local artists joined the government and partners in calling for an end to TB through the performance at the commemoration.