KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE EXECUTIVE MAYOR DURING THE TB/HIV COLLABORATION EVENT HELD ON THE 13TH AUGUST 2009 AT BELA - BELA SANFA SPORT GROUNDS

Programme Director,

The Mayor of Bela Bela,

All Councillors present,

Waterberg District Manager for the Department of Health and Social Development,

Officials from both Government Departments and municipalities,

Various Community Based structures,

Ladies and Genntlemen,

Good Morning, Thobela!

Programme Director, it is indeed a great pleasure and honour for me to address the community of Waterberg under the Municipality of Bela Bela on TB and HIV collaboration event. I would like to appreciate the efforts by the District Department of Health and Social Development to organise this collaboration campaign against Tuberculosis and HIV in an endeavour to disseminate information to communities on the two epidemic.

The purpose of this event today is to make the people of our district and in particular Bela Bela aware of the seriousness of TB as well as HIV/AIDS and to encourage them to undergo voluntary tests.

As government, we are committed to join hands with all stakeholders to fight against this pandemic and as a result we paid our special attention by providing and channelling the necessary resources and support to the two diseases.

Social mobilisation and awareness campaigns have been increased by conducting door to door campaigns and making all relevant materials available to communities. Programme Director, I think the department should have selected another Sub –District to host this event but they identified Bela Bela because of the escalating number of TB and HIV clients around this area.

Ladies and gentlemen we speaking here of two different diseases, let`s first direct our focus to TB:

- The bacterium that causes Tuberculosis was discovered on the 24th March 1882. This is the reason why each year the World TB Day is commemorated on the 24th of March.

- TB is one of the major health challenges facing our country. This disease continues to spread because of the difficult conditions under which our people live.

- These poverty related challenges, which as government and municipalities are determined to address, include poor nutrition and inadequate housing.

- Our goal is to ensure that TB cases are detected and diagnosed as early as possible and ensure treatment success.

- We therefore calling for communities including those with infected with HIV/AIDS to undergo voluntary TB tests.

- The main challenge that i know the Department still experience, is the inability of their patients to complete their treatment, hence leading to the development of drug resistant strains of TB which is more challenging and expensive to treat.

- The first line for a patient with ordinary TB is costed at R400. This costs escalates to R24 000 for MDR TB and more than R40 000 for XDR TB per patient for the period of 24 months.

- Together with all our stakeholders we should strive and ensure that we encourage our patients to adhere to the first prescribed treatment to prevent resistance and to save limited resources at our disposal.

Programme Director, it is a researched fact that TB is the leading cause of death among our people living with HIV/AIDS in Africa. It is also the most common presenting illness among people living with HIV. We have to intensify our efforts to raise awareness about the symptoms of TB and persuade health seeking behaviour. We have to mobilise our support for TB patients to assist them to complete the six months treatment programme.

I was informed that the department has already paid particular focus on strengthening infection control precautions at our health facilities in order to reduce possible transmission by isolating patients, creating adequate bed floor space, improving ventilation in wards and addressing other infrastructural problems.

However, the statistics conducted in 2008, revealed that there is an estimated 979 HIV positive TB patients in the Waterberg District of which 163 of them are from Bela Bela Sub District.

The survey further revealed that some of the causes ranges from poverty, ignorance, cultural and religious beliefs, defaulting TB treatment and late presentation for HIV tests.

We therefore call upon all people living with HIV to undergo an early diagnosis by volunteering to be screened for TB. The department is also requested to introduce programmes which will motivate people to voluntarily undergo this diagnosis and testing.

Ladies and gentlemen let`s now shift our focus to HIV:

- The Waterberg District has been categorised as the number one Antenatal Sero HIV prevalence as compared to other four districts in our province. This clearly means together with all our stakeholders must hold hands in ensuring that we fight against this killer disease.

- Programme Director, as leaders and community members let us encourage our people living with HIV to undergo an early diagnosis by volunteering to be screened for TB so as to receive the necessary care and treatment they deserve.

- The main reason why we gathered here with all our stakeholders, is also to raise awareness to our people and further encourage them to utilize the government facilities at their disposal so that they can have access to prevention and cure.

- The National Government target is to reduce HIV/AIDS infection by 50% in 2011 and therefore in an endeavor to reach that target, all of us who are not sure about their status need to be tested and counseled as the entry point to prevention.

- I know the department is offering other programmes to pregnant women - that is prevention of mother to child transmission so that positive mother do not infect the unborn child during and after delivery.

- Programme Director, we should seen to be encouraging sectors like Women in partnership against HIV/AIDS, Men in partnership against HIV/AIDS, House of the Traditional Leaders, Business Sectors, Traditional Healers, Non Government Organizations and all Faith based organization to come out and conduct awareness campaigns on TB/HIV collaboration.

- Ladies and gentlemen we are forced to strengthen and sustain functional multi-sectoral partnerships for them to ensure a comprehensive, collaboration and coordinated response to TB and HIV.

- Together We Are a Solution. It is important that we work together to encourage correct and consistent use of condoms as the best barrier available to those who are sexually active to protect themselves against sexually transmitted infections and unplanned or unwanted pregnancies.

- The abuse of alcohol and drugs by youth also contribute to the high transmission of this epidemic. We therefore appeal to our youth to stay away from the abuse of these substances.

In conclusion Programme Director, TB and HIV remain major challenges facing us as Waterberg and the country as well. However, as government we have a hospital and facilities in the form of clinics around Bela Bela Municipality which offers the following services:

- ❖ TB services
- ❖ Voluntary counselling and testing
- ❖ Prevention from mother to child testing
- ❖ Chronic conditions
- ❖ Minor ailments
- ❖ Mother, child, youth, women health and nutrition

It should be emphasised that the success of our interventions is dependant on forging of strong partnerships. We therefore have to work together as stakeholders and complement each other in a multi-sectoral and comprehensive response to TB and HIV.

Let us work together to stop TB and HIV infections and continue to keep the promise.

KE A LEBOGA, I THANK YOU