

**KEYNOTE OPENING SPEECH ON THE OCCASION OF THE MEETING OF
MINISTERS OF HEALTH OF THE 8 SOUTHERN AFRICAN COUNTRIES
BY THE RIGHT HONORABLE PRIME MINISTER NAHAS ANGULA FOR
MALARIA ELIMINATION
WINDHOEK COUNTRY CLUB
MONDAY 02 MARCH 2009**

- Director of Ceremonies
- Ministers of Health and Deputy Ministers from the countries represented here today,
- Vice Chancellor of the University of Namibia, the Rector of Polytechnic of Namibia,
- Honourable Ambassadors and Heads of Foreign Missions
- Country Representatives and other Heads of U.N. agencies
- Dr. Bernard Nahlen, Director of the President's Malaria Initiative
- USAID Country Director, Mr. Gregory Gottlieb
- Dr. Sir Richard Feachem, Executive Director of the Global Health Group
- Dr. Steven Phillips. Medical Director of ExxonMobil
- All stakeholders in malaria control
- Members of the Media
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Republic and the people of Namibia, it is my distinct pleasure and honour to welcome you all to Windhoek. The deliberations and outcomes of this meeting will bear on the lives of millions of people in our sub-region. I thank you all for taking the time to gather here to contribute your experiences, expertise, and resources to the goal of malaria elimination. Eliminating malaria from our region will require us all to join forces and unite behind a singular resolve – zero local transmission of malaria from our sub-region.

Your work over the next two days draws its mandate from several important commitments and declarations made at the African Union and SADC levels. In 2007, when the African Union Conference of Health Ministers launched the Africa Malaria Elimination Campaign, a commitment was made to transition eligible African Union countries from malaria control to elimination. Our Southern-Africa region followed suit later that year, similarly pledging to eliminate malaria from the eligible countries within SADC. It is true, the work of controlling and eliminating malaria is mandated by these commitments and declarations. However, let us remember that the reason for those commitments, are hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children whose lives may be spared if we deliver on those commitments. In our SADC region alone, 20 million malaria episodes occur every year, resulting in 300,000 – 400,000 malaria-related deaths annually.

74 percent of our people in the region live in malaria-affected areas. They are therefore at risk of the disease, which is still fatal in some cases, yet unnecessarily so. These are the people to whom we all are accountable and I am sure this meeting will have their health in mind, as the ultimate prize of malaria elimination within SADC.

**Director of Ceremonies,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

It is also important for us to be aware that the possibilities opened up by malaria elimination extend far beyond the health sector. Through its impact on child development and educational outcomes, improved malaria control and

elimination will improve the productivity and the growth of our region, freeing up much needed resources for other critical areas of development. Our region may also see growth in tourism and foreign investment once malaria is eliminated. Studies have estimated the economic burden of malaria on highly endemic countries at a 1.3 percent loss in economic growth every year. So let us appreciate that while the world is battling with a financial and economic crisis, there is need to ensure that we continue with and even strengthen highly cost-effective intervention programmes such as malaria elimination. Let us therefore seriously consider the positive financial and economic implications of malaria elimination for our region. It is an investment with very high returns.

Director of Ceremonies,

The Government of Namibia has and will continue to provide the largest portion of the country's malaria control budget. While we fully appreciate all technical and financial assistance we receive from our development partners, we as a government, through the Ministry of Health and Social Services, remain fully committed to sustaining malaria activities in our country over the long run. We recognize that even after transmission rates decline and even when the elimination goal is attained, consolidating and maintaining elimination status and preventing re-introduction will continue to require resources. We are also appreciative of the presence here today of many of our important international supporters, including the Global Fund to fight HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the United States Government, the Global Health Group and the Clinton Foundation. While thanking you for being here today, I urge you to remain committed to the fight with us, so that we may finish this race that we have begun, in the same spirit of partnership.

Director of ceremonies**Distinguished guests**

In recent months, the world has come to appreciate more than ever, the value of partnerships in today's global order of interconnected societies and economies. The concept of regional collaboration has long been in practice in SADC. Our liberation struggle for Namibia's independence bears witness to this. The concept of the Elimination 8, in which the four frontline countries will pave the way for malaria elimination for their northern neighbours, is much like that. In this fight for malaria elimination, our success today lies, as it did then, in the extent to which we partner with and support our neighbours.

Director of Ceremonies,

Namibia therefore reaffirms its pledge to the goal of malaria elimination within our country. We pledge to support our neighbours and all the Elimination 8 with the same resolve and determination which we will apply to eliminating malaria from within Namibia. The Government of the Republic of Namibia commits to action. We will strengthen the workable, robust cross-border initiatives with our neighbours. We intend to increase access to free diagnostics and medicines for malaria, and to continue to strengthen efforts to control the mosquito vector. We recognize that the benefits will be universal, and that the prize is awarded to us all.

You have much work ahead of you; the goal of malaria elimination is an ambitious one, but it is not an unreasonable one. We are encouraged by the successes of other countries, including Mauritius in SADC, as well as Tunisia and Morocco in North Africa. The recent technological progress in diagnostics, medicines, and insecticides all further increase the prospects for elimination. We therefore have every reason to be confident of success because we now have better tools. For example, we know that we can suppress the mosquito vector using DDT; in fact, some among you here championed the use of DDT and other insecticides, thereby leading the world to realize its important role in reducing malaria morbidity and mortality.

In conclusion, let me express my satisfaction with this excellent initiative. I understand this will only be the first in a series of forums for collective decision-making and planning on a regional approach to malaria elimination, which will be taken forward to your forthcoming SADC Health Ministers' meeting and also the next AU Health Ministers' Conference. I congratulate you, the Ministers of Health, and all the development partners on taking the Malaria Elimination Agenda forward through this impressive gathering. I wish you a very pleasant stay in Namibia and wish you most fruitful deliberations.

I thank you.