

Welcoming Remarks

BY

Dr. Richard Nchabi Kamwi, MP

MINISTER OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL  
SERVICES

DURING THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE E-8  
MALARIA ELIMINATION MINISTERIAL  
MEETING

WINDHOEK COUNTRY CLUB

02 MARCH 2009

The Chairperson of SADC Health Ministers – Hon. Barbara Hogan

The Rt. Honorable Prime Minister – Nahas Angula

Hon. Ministers and Deputy Ministers

The Executive Director of the Global Health Group, University of California  
– Prof. Sir Richard Feachem

The Director of the US President’s Malaria Initiative – Dr. Bernard Nahlen

The Medical Director of ExxonMobil – Dr. Steven Phillips

The Executive Director of Roll Back Malaria – Prof. Awa Marie Coll-Seck

The UN Resident Coordinator – Mr. Simon Nhongo

WHO Country Representative – Dr. Magda Robalo

Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps

The USAID Country Director – Mr. Gregory Gottlieb

Dr. John Paul Clark, World Bank

The Vice Chancellor of the University of Namibia, and the Rector of the  
Polytechnic of Namibia

All stakeholders involved in malaria control

Members of the media

Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me begin by expressing a heartfelt welcome to Namibia and the Malaria Elimination Ministerial – or E-8 in short – Meeting. We are honoured by your presence and your keen interest in gathering here to address the subject of malaria elimination in our sub-region. To my colleagues, the Ministers and Deputy Ministers of Health from the seven SADC Member States, please accept my sincere appreciation for your overwhelming support for this initiative. It is testimony of the your concern for the welfare of the people we serve, and of your convection of the mutual benefit that our sub-region, and our individual countries can derive from this initiative. I believe that from our deliberations, we can develop innovative approaches to tackle our region's malaria burden, making indelible marks on health for all.

On a personal note, with a background of entomology and parasitology, it is pleasing to see so many members of the malaria family, both old and new. Many of us spent years together in the fight against malaria control and advocating for better insecticides and technologies on a global level. As a result of these endeavours, we are gathered here today to deliberate on possible malaria elimination. Indeed, we have come a long way; malaria is now in the spotlight and the world is beginning to pay attention to the impact of this disease on the global socio-economic agenda.

Chairperson, for you as an advocate of HIV and AIDS, you may wish to know that it was during the UNGASS meeting of 2006 when I first met Professor Sir Richard Feachem while lobbying for more financial support to SADC Member States as an epicenter of HIV and AIDS.

In response, Professor Sir Feachem informed me that his dream was to eliminate malaria, especially in Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, and Swaziland. As a malariologist, I responded to say that he may be right, but that this can be done only if the other countries bordering them were brought on board. Four months ago, Professor Sir Feachem came to Namibia, accompanied by Dr. Phillips of ExxonMobil to request Namibia to host this meeting.

Against this background, I would like, on behalf of the Ministry of Health and Social Services, and indeed myself, to extend our heartfelt thanks and appreciation for the generous sponsorship from ExxonMobil, which helped to bring us together today. I would like to recognize the technical assistance provided by Dr. Magda Robalo, WHO Country Representative, as well as

Prof. Dr. Awa Marie Coll-Seck, Executive Director of Roll Back Malaria.  
Colleagues, thank you.

Chairperson, Dear Colleagues,

A little more than a year ago, many of us were in Victoria Falls, where we signed onto the SADC Malaria Elimination Framework, committing ourselves to identifying target areas for possible malaria elimination, and to developing Strategic Plans for elimination. Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, and Swaziland – what are referred to as the frontline countries, have since been earmarked by WHO for elimination due to low transmission status and other favourable epidemiological and climatic conditions. Clearly, these four countries cannot go it alone.

In this regard, cross-border collaboration is fundamental if endemic countries are to succeed in reducing malaria transmission to zero. Our neighbours with higher transmission are critical partners in our elimination strategies, as the malaria vectors and parasites respect no borders. Accordingly, there is a need for the other member countries to integrate their malaria control programmes with other countries targeted for elimination. We all stand to benefit from sustained zero transmission, as this will provide a foundation for the “second line” countries to progressively reduce transmission, and eventually eliminate malaria from our countries. We thus have the eight countries most poised and most strategically situated to contribute to the elimination of malaria from southern Africa gathered here today. Let us continue the momentum that was begun in our previous meetings.

Chairperson,

We all recognize that an individual country approach to what is a regional problem that easily crosses borders cannot be dealt with in isolation. Malaria is a challenge that knows no borders, and therefore, must be tackled with similar strategies; indeed, strategies that equally know no borders. When we consider the movement of our people across borders, and the import and export of cases, we appreciate the imperative of cross-border collaboration, and of a regional approach to elimination. The actions that one country takes – or fails to take – will have consequences for its neighbours. I believe therefore, that there is an urgent need to *establish a regional approach for achieving malaria elimination in the eight countries in the context of the*

*SADC malaria elimination commitments*. This is the first objective of the meeting.

We must therefore deliberate on how we put in place practical and functional programs which serve this purpose of collaboration across borders and the greater sub-region. One approach we might consider as an example is the Lubombo-Spatial Development Initiative between South Africa, Swaziland, and Mozambique. This collaboration initiative has reduced prevalence in target areas by more than ninety percent. The experience of the Lubombo Initiative, and many others, illustrates the advantages to be gained from joining forces across borders. It is clear from the above example that to succeed, we must commit ourselves to work together over the long term.

Our second objective for this meeting should therefore be *to develop a functional mechanism for elimination support, recognizing the different needs of front-line and second-line countries*.

We all realize the resource implications of implementing such programs, especially in the tight fiscal environment that the world is in today. On Day 2 of this meeting, we will have a panel to assist the meeting to explore the availability of resources to support our goals. Let me take this opportunity to thank the World Bank and others who have already begun to propose possible financing concepts for the region. The third objective is *to agree on a framework for financing and pursuing resources to support malaria elimination*.

The fourth and final objective is to identify and commit to supporting key cross-border initiatives which will move the region's elimination agenda forward. In addition to LSDI, there are other collaboration initiative underway and which have already begun to operationalize this idea of a regional approach.

Chairperson,  
Dear Colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is clear therefore, from the four objectives I referred to earlier, that our work over the next two days is clearly cut out for us. I look forward to your valuable inputs. I encourage us to leave no stone unturned as we consider every possible solution. Let us learn from the experience of the past, while

being bold enough to challenge whatever accepted notions that may be detrimental to our effort. And as key deliverables or outcomes at the end of this meeting, we look forward to a joint sub-regional strategy for malaria elimination to be agreed upon.

I look forward to the work of the next two days.

Thank you.