

**WELCOMING REMARKS BY THE PREMIER OF THE PROVINCE OF KWA-ZULU NATAL MR WILLIES MCHUNU AT THE OPENING OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> INTERNATIONAL AIDS CONFERENCE**

**INKOSI ALBERT LUTHULI INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTRE**

**18 JULY 2016**

**(protocol to be provided separately)**

Allow me to extend a warm welcome to all delegates from different parts of our country and the globe.

On behalf of the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial government I would like to express my appreciation to the leadership of the International Aids Society especially, President Chris Beyrer. We thank you for choosing Durban as the host city for this esteemed conference.

Equally, we thank the President of the Republic His Excellency J.G Zuma for the leadership and support.

Over the years, we have worked hard to ensure that we portray this province as an important site for exchange of ideas, and finding solutions to problems of different parts of the globe.

We welcome the opportunity to host this conference which is a gathering of scientists, policymakers and non-governmental organisations, health activists and community healthcare workers.

**We dedicate this Conference to Nelson Mandela**

We dedicate this International AIDS Conference to our beloved Tata Madiba. Inspired by his spirit and dedication, we want to state to the people of this country and the world that we will do everything in our power to make you feel comfortable away from home.

We promise to host the most successful ever HIV AIDS conference giving delegates the opportunity to shape efforts that will strengthen a global fight against this pandemic.

This is the most important conference given the fact that it coincides with the birthday of our beloved former President Nelson Mandela.

It is important to note that the Province of KwaZulu-Natal will always be linked

with the story of Nelson Mandela.

We recall that in 2000 Madiba captured the attention of the world during the International AIDS Conference held at the Inkosi Albert Luthuli Convention Centre.

Mandela used his influence to unite more than 12 000 delegates who had been arguing with no hope of reaching consensus on a number of fronts.

He said never ending arguments were distracting attention "from the real life-and-death issues we are confronted with as a country, a region, a continent and a world".

He further noted: "That dispute must be put on the back burner, he said. Nobody was totally in the right or in the wrong."

Since Madiba made that statement, we have made progress as the province.

Although there are challenges ahead, it is encouraging to note that the province runs the biggest ART treatment programme the world has ever seen.

Besides providing the largest treatment programme, the province has reduced mother to child transmission of HIV to a point where we can confidently say HIV positive mother are giving birth to HIV negative babies

**Ladies and Gentlemen,** this would not have been possible without a decisive leadership of Nelson Mandela which he provided during the International AIDS Conference and throughout his term of office.

We stand up this evening to salute a man who strode with grace and elegance among the great statesmen of our time and commanded an exalted place for us people in the community of nations.

We respectfully bow our heads in honour of a leader and a champion for an AIDS Free Generation.

The 67 minutes dedicated to Tata Madiba today is an indication that the whole world was been blessed with the life of Madiba, and our generation will count itself fortunate to have been part of the experience.

Madiba's life has been synonymous with the fight for human rights, justice, peace, reconciliation, equality and, most of all, selfless love, compassion and the triumph of human spirit despite all adversity.

We remain indebted and shall forever be grateful to Madiba for his unique and exemplary leadership.

In conclusion, I want to state that the 21<sup>st</sup> International AIDS Conference provides a platform for all of us to strengthen our efforts in the fight against this scourge.

The presence of international delegates will enable us to learn best practices and enhance our strategies in order to make an impact at local levels.

As the province we want to emerge out of the conference with strategies that will ensure an improvement in the AIDS awareness campaigns as well as health promotion activities.

We are confident that the conference will help strengthen the campaign on treatment adherence as well as campaigns on testing and counseling for confirmed HIV patients.

To the people of KwaZulu-Natal, let us ensure that we make the delegates' stay in Durban a pleasant one. Let us make sure that they enjoy the diversity of our cultures, religions and get to learn the different languages that make us a rainbow nation.

I thank you.