



WELCOME ADDRESS BY THE HON. MINISTER FOR MANPOWER DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYMENT MR.YAW BARIMAH (MP), AT THE WORKSHOP ON "HIV/AIDS AND THE WORLD OF WORK" HELD AT LA PALM CONFERENCE CEFNTRE FJROM NOVERBER 18TH - 19TH 2004

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MR. CHAIRMAN,
PRESIDENTIAL ADVISER ON HIV/AIDS IN GHANA
THE HON. MINISTER OF HEALTH OF SIERRA LEONE,
DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF GHANA AIDS COMMISSION,
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

I am happy to be invited to give the welcome address at this workshop on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work.

First of all, I wish to welcome all of you, especially those of you who have traveled from your various countries to participate in the Workshop.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic is now a global crisis and constitutes one of the most formidable challenges to development gains; undermining economies, threatening security and destabilizing societies.

AIDS strikes down men and women in the prime of their working lives. Of the estimate4d millions of people who have been infected with HIV/AIDS throughout the world, about three quarters are adults of working age.

As the AIDS pandemic gathers momentum, its effects on the workplace and productivity will be felt even more acutely in developing countries.

Yet, the workplace can also play a frontline role in preventing the further spread of HIV/AIDS in coping with the effects of the disease on individuals, their families and communities. People in formal employment, though not necessarily a captive audience are accessible in their place of work. They can be reached on a regular basis with the information and support they need to make responsible decision about their sexual behavior and encouraged to show solidarity and respect towards co-workers, neighbours, relatives and friends who are infected with HIV/AIDS.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

As you are aware, AIDS is widely regarded as a cause for shame, fear, stigmatization and denial. Most people conceal their HIV/AIDS status because of fear of rejection by friends, family members, neighbours and co-workers. They face discrimination and sometimes are dismissed by their employers.

The fact that the disease is affecting adults of working age poses a threat not only to the health of the nation but also to productivity at all levels e.g. factories, the agricultural & mining sectors, and other enterprises

that constitute the productive sector of the economy. AIDS also threaten the country's financial, administrative and social infrastructure. It is therefore a threat to livelihoods of millions of people and the welfare of their families regardless of whether they are infected or not.

Another impact on the workplace will be the loss of thousands of skilled and semi-skill workers. Recruiting and training staff to replace all those lost to AIDS will be both costly and time-consuming.

Furthermore, employers will also face the prospect of higher medical costs and increased contributions to health insurance schemes. AIDS is a real threat to society and even the survival of many companies in developing countries including Ghana.

HIV/AIDS affects the work of government in terms of revenue, expenditure, service provision and the ability to govern. Government therefore has a vital role to play in protecting the HUMAN Rights of all persons affected by the disease and to encourage an open and tolerant public response.

It is in the light of the above that the ILO is committed to making a strong statement through the code of practice on HIV/AIDS in the World of Work.

The code is at the core of the ILO programme on HIV/AIDS providing guidance to governments, employers and workers as well as other stakeholders on National Action Plans and workplace policies to combat HIV/AIDS.

The policy is guided by the constitution of Ghana and other key principles developed by the ILO, namely, recognizing HIV/AIDS as a workplace issue and so treating it like any other serious illness. Ensuring non-discrimination against any infected worker on the basis of real or perceived HIV status. Recognizing the gender dimensions of HIV/AIDS and promoting healthy work environment to reduce the transmission of HIV among others.

The policy goal is to provide broad national guidelines to direct the formulation of workplace policies and programmes. In this regard, broad objectives of the policy are to prevent HIV/AIDS spread among workers, provide care support and counseling for those infected and affected and provide protection from discrimination in the workplace.

Mr. Chairman,

The policy aims as follows:

- to develop concrete gender sensitive responses at the enterprise, regional and sectoral levels;
- to promote dialogue, consultation and cooperation between social partners;
- to promote occupational health and safety.

It is imperative for government to work out an effective and strategic response to stem the tide of this menace. HIV/AIDS is effectively addressed when approached as a multi-sectoral concern. This means the disease needs to be fought on several fronts.

At this juncture, I wish to commend the Ghana Aids Commission for providing effective leadership and coordination for the multi-sectoral response, the ILO, the Economic Commission for Africa as well as Civil Society Organizations (CSO), MDAs and other organizations for their active involvement in the workplace program.

The greatest enemies of the battle against HIV/AIDS are ignorance, fear and discrimination. We want to fight the virus not the people living with it. We therefore need all hands on deck to fight this menace.

I hope we shall all leave here well-armed with more information on HIV/AIDS and become "change agent" in our own ways as well as soldier on the march in the battle against HIV/AIDS at workplace.

On this note I welcome you, once again and say "Akwaaba" and wish you every success in your deliberations.

Thank You !!!

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