

**STATEMENT BY ACTING PRIME MINISTER**  
**SENATOR THEMBA NHLANGANISO MASUKU**  
**AT THE ESWATINI COMMEMORATION OF WORLD AIDS DAY**  
**THE GEORGE HOTEL, MANZINI**

**01 DECEMBER 2020**

- Bantfwabenkhusi
- Bobabe Boshifu
- Cabinet Ministers
- Members of both Houses of Parliament
- Your Excellencies Members of the Diplomatic Corps
- Regional Administrator
- United Nations Representatives
- People Living With HIV
- Civil Society Partners
- Members Of The Media
- Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to address you during this significant occasion in which we commemorate World Aids Day 2020. I wish to also acknowledge our international stakeholders who are following this event virtually.

The year 2020 has been a bitter-sweet year for the Kingdom of Eswatini; bitter because of the advent of COVID-19; and sweet because Eswatini singularly made a spectacular achievement of reaching and surpassing the set global targets of 95-95-95.

The 95-95-95 treatment cascade means that, of the estimated 200,000 People Living with HIV in Eswatini, over 95% know their status, over 95% of those who know their status are on life saving treatment and over 95% of those on treatment are virally suppressed. These impressive and spectacular achievements are a result of resolute efforts by Government and our partners.

UNAIDS reports Eswatini to be the only country in the world to have managed this outstanding achievement. What is even more impressive is that it is two years ahead of our own target of 2022 as announced by His Majesty King Mswati III in February 2015.

And it is 10 years ahead of the Global community whose target is 2030.

May I recognize the astute leadership of His Majesty King Mswati III who has steered our ship with tact and wise precision as we navigated through these rough tides of HIV and AIDS. I also wish to congratulate Eswatini and all key partners who have played a major role and contributed to this massive achievement in such a record period. Indeed, no one stakeholder could have amassed the required resources to achieve such impressive results. Eswatini will remain ambitious and tirelessly work towards ensuring that we reach the 100% mark by ensuring that all persons living with HIV are enrolled on life saving treatment early.

As a country, we have surely come a long way since the first HIV and AIDS case was discovered in 1986. Since then, Eswatini has put forward a formidable response to the HIV and AIDS epidemic. Some of our responses included the formulation of the Swaziland National AIDS Programme (SNAP); the establishment of the Crisis Management Technical Committee (CMTCT) in 1999

and the subsequent development of the first multi-sectoral strategic plan on HIV and AIDS 2000-2005.

In 2001, His Majesty's Government established NERCHA to lead, coordinate and facilitate the national multi-sectoral response to the epidemic. UNAIDS led the process of assisting the country develop the HIV Investment Case in 2016; which defined the key five programmes that would turn the tide in the HIV response. These included: the rollout of Antiretroviral Treatment, prevention of Mother to Child Transmission, Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision, prevention targeting adolescent girls and young women and their partners as well as managing TB/HIV Co-infection.

I wish to appreciate the role played by key partners in the Eswatini multi-sectoral HIV and AIDS response, in collaboration and supporting the role of NERCHA. These include Government sectors, UNAIDS and the World Bank, the Global Fund, the private sector, civil society, faith-based organisations as well as community leaders.

These are some of the pillars that have made HIV response the success that it is today. We are indeed working in solidarity. And I wish to implore all stakeholders to continue working with Government as we continue to strengthen the HIV response. May I advise NERCHA and her partners to document the story of the HIV response to be used by the country to inform future plans.

I am sure we all agree that HIV/AIDS is a crisis of enormous spiritual, social and economic and proportions. Overcoming HIV/AIDS and the stigma that fuels its spread is one of the most serious challenges of our time. It requires courage, commitment and leadership at all levels, especially among religious leaders to use the trust and authority they have in their communities to change the course of the pandemic.

Looking ahead, Eswatini should remain alert, day and night and hold steadfastly to the gains made and sustain these gains to 2022, which is our target year and further to 2030 which is the global target reporting year.

Let me once again reiterate His Majesty's Government's commitment towards supporting the HIV and AIDS response. We have and we will continue to safeguard investment in HIV, health, education and social sectors that have a major impact on the HIV response.

Let us encourage new innovations to enhance the enrollment of all people living with HIV on treatment to achieve His Majesty's vision of ending AIDS by 2022. It is important that we effectively ensure that all citizens have access to health services. The Ministry of Health and her partners is expanding service delivery to reach other key populations within their safe spaces. Indeed, the country will leave no one behind in delivering HIV services.

Before I conclude, allow me to address some of the structural drivers of HIV which have a direct impact on the country's ability to sustain the hard-earned HIV achievements mentioned earlier. Gender Based Violence has been on the increase in recent times and reached alarming levels during the current year. MaSwati, asiyikele lendzaba yakushayana! Violence in the hands of your

loved one is intolerable, as this kind of behaviour impacts the family, the community and the country.

Teenage pregnancies have similarly escalated this year. To young people, I request you to learn from the experiences of others and refuse to tread the same paths which will derail your progress towards your life goals. Please avoid engaging in risky behaviour.

Poverty and unemployment remains key challenges that Government is working in earnest to address. We continue to request our friends and partners to support the multi-sectoral response to HIV and AIDS as we tackle all the social ills.

Today is about saluting the souls lost to the epidemic, reigniting the passion of our foot soldiers to continue doing the good, reminding our communities of their important role in the HIV fight and, most of all, remind each other of the good work done.

We take stock of what more needs to be done with a sense of renewed energy to deliver much needed HIV services to all that need them.

In line with this year's World AIDS Day theme, ***“Eswatini Ending AIDS in solidarity by 2022: A shared responsibility”***, let us continue the spirit of solidarity. Let us breathe new energy and life into our HIV response; reignite our individual and collective passion in the delivery of the HIV and AIDS response, and strengthen all partnerships at community, regional, national and international levels.

With those remarks, sitsi ***‘SIBUMBENE!!! NGIMI NAWWE SINCOBA I-AIDS NGEMNYAKA WA2022.’***

Siyabonga. Thank you.