**KEY MESSAGES TO OPENING OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN AIDS CONFERENCE:**

Honourable National Minister of Health, Dr Phaahla

Honourable Deputy Miniters - Dr Mhaule & Hnr Sidumo Dlamini, Hnr Bogopane Zulu

MEC for Health, KZN, Ms Simelane, MECs from other provinces

Ethekwini Mayor Hnr Kaunda

AIDS Conference Programme Committee, specifically Dr Maimela and Dr Chidarikire,

UN Resident Coordinator, Dr Muffuh and the UN Family

SANAC CEO, Dr. Thembisile Xulu

National and provincial SANAC Civil Society Forum Chairpersons and Sector Leaders, most importantly representatives of priority populations and People living with HIV

US – PEPFAR representatives

Members of the media

Distinguished delegates, Comrades and Colleagues,

All protocol observed

* It is a privilege to be part of the 11th South African AIDS Conference in Durban under the theme *Act, Connect and End the Epidemic*. 2023 and beyond is the time to *Act* and more importantly to take *Action* if we want to reach the targets for our nation’s own National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 and ultimately the 2030 global targets including those set within the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG).
* As the Co-Chairperson of SANAC, I am proud to have been part of the development of the 5th National Strategic Plan on HIV, TB and STI’s (NSP) 2023 -2028, rightly dubbed “The people’s NSP”, this is the same plan that brings us together as a part of the AIDS Conference to reflect on the domestic commitments and global targets. The plan’s focus is of a multi-sectoral approach that guide us on how we’re going to put our foot on the gas and accelerate our efforts to achieve the 95-95-95 targets and it speak to shared objectives, shared responsibility, shared leadership and shared accountability.
* The new NSP ask from all of us to recognises the need to ensure our response is comprehensive, focused and yields the results we envisaged. We do not have the luxury of missing opportunities to change the lives of priority populations. We must not miss this unique opportunity to be the drivers of change in this coming few years.
* My task this evening is to focus on ensuring that LGBTQIA+ takes centre stage, that it does not fall of the agenda, and yes I am passionate about this as a part of fundamental human rights agenda aligned to the principles of our Constitution of the country and the universal declaration of human rights, but as the Chairperson the SANAC Civil Society Forum I am responsible for ensuring that NO ONE, AND NO ONE SECTOR IS LEFT BEHIND.
* We have come a long way in address the public health threats through the human right lens. This was reflected during the International AIDS Conference hosted in South Africa in 2000 & 2016, subsequently the national AIDS Conference that have been held for 10th times. The Sub-Saharan Africa is challenged by many issues that creates barriers to accessing affirmative and competent services; this includes enabled legal environment, social environment and even denied economic environment. Why are we so comfortable when injustices happen under our watch, when LGBTI people continue to be humiliated, discriminated, and even murdered. Why are we so comfortable to allow sex workers, People who inject drug users get harassed, discriminated and murdered. Why are we comfortable when people with disability get rejected and discriminated? Why are we comfortable when people living with HIV are discriminated and stigmatised?? When people abuse their power, abuse the public service for their own personal views?
* We have even want to be by-standers when countries such as Uganda, Ghana, Kenya,Tanzania and Namibia introduce anti-homosexuality laws that seeks to erase LGBTI people, undermine the health agenda, undermine the human rights of citizens of this countries. Injustice there, means injustice where we are. Freedom is compromised, when remain silent. There is a say “We will not remember the words of the our enemies, but the silence of our friends”
* There is an odd 67 countries across the world, 29 countries in Africa criminalises homosexual act. 5 countries in Africa have decriminalised, with 4 in Americas! This is a decolonising business! Transformation business, we are not interested in liberators who have become oppressors of today. We want to caution those who receive monies in our names, but are not prepared to address homophobia and transphobia.
* As the SANAC civil society, we stand in solidarity with the LGBTIQ+ population and civil society organizations in Uganda and condemn in the strongest terms the anti-homosexuality bill recently passed by the Ugandan Parliament, not even parliament, politicians. This bill is truly draconian and this law will lead to even more hate crimes and human rights violations against individuals who identify as LGBTIQ+ in a country where homophobia and transphobia is already rampant. This law goes far beyond any existing anti-homosexual legislation because it targets an individual’s very existence. As responsible South African and global citizens, we should ACT and not be silenced, we should act and not be ignorant, we should support built solidarity and not be bystanders…Government, civil society, private sector and development partners should speak in one voice and be the voice of the LGBTIQ+ population in Uganda, and countries where injustices continue to take place. This is the same business of saving lives, this is the same business where prosperity for all can be achieved….
* We often create a ‘social profiles of priority populations’, wanting to box them into particular demographic profile and most of the time to paints bleak pictures – *sex workers live in households below the poverty line* - *young people are unemployed* – *people with disabilities are not able to engage in healthy sexual relationships*.… As a result, many South Africans have a prevailing perception that priority populations as a ticking time bomb – a difficult, problematic, and high risk groups of people who threaten the stability of the country. I must commend the work done by MECs in Provinces in seeking to turn the tide of services for services for key populations, provinces such as Gauteng, Kwa-Zulu Natal, western cape, North West, and Mpumalanga, where there has been public service sites -where competency is build. We applaud the leadership of the department of health in provinces
* **Minister and distinguished delegates -This morning,**  we visited the Hillcrest hospice where 80% admissions are people in their AIDS stages, the youngest is 14yrs and 25yrs. It is a reminder that we are sitting on a time bomb if our ART program has no psychosocial support systems, extended to care and support within the palliative system. AIDS is killing people now, this conference must remember that the struggle to end deaths and stop hiv incidents is ongoing.Do not allow our people to die! Not with a successful Treatment programme, urgently address treatment fatigue and treatment holiday, but let us address the dignity of those who are about to die. I call you friends, join me, join CSF as we adopt the Centre. MEC Nomagugu has committed, let us give dignity to the people.
* Later this morning, we did the Love-Picketing march - as civil society and community members of eThekwini, as youth and women led communities and solidarity organisations, human rights defenders, PLHIV, sex workers, health professionals, people with disabilities, LGBTI, to as a collective make real our commitments to honour, defend and make visible our rights that the South African government are signatory to amongst others the Maputo Protocol, The Africa Commissions’ Resolution 275, and our domestic instruments such as the Sexual Offences Act and the Patients’ Rights Charter - all developed by and for the lived realities of Africans.
* For me, there is no quick fix for the unplanned pregnancies, HIV and STIs, gender-based violence and a general lack of sexual agency, but it is important to understand that priority populations are counting on you and me, young people, youth are counting on you and I. when I addressed the youth preconference -I was convinced that we need to do more – give space to young people. Share the power with young people in order to secure the future. Join the various campaigns such as zikhala kanjani, 1.8 billion and the edu plus. Give young people options – the ring, Oral and injectable PREp, give young people contraceptives, including Hormonal Replacement Therapy…..prevention is possible! AIDS free generation is possible if we act now!
* You and I are the glue that can play an effective role to hold together the HIV, TB and STI responses for priority populations, the most important times of our country. We need to Act, We need to Connect with the very people that we serve and it is only through doing this that we would be able to End the Epidemic that are affecting the priority populations of our country.It is possible! We either do it now, or we don’t do it at all. Put people first. Thank you!