



health

Department:
Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



**SPEAKING NOTES
FOR MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY HONOURABLE MTHEMBU
DE-COMMODIFYING HEALTH: A HUMAN RIGHT PERSPECTIVE OF UNIVERSAL HEALTH
COVERAGE IN SOUTH AFRICA”**

**Crowne Plaza, Nairobi,
13 November 2019, 14:00-16:00**

Moderator of the Programme Dr Olalere
Representative of the World Health Organisation
Heads of other UN Organisations present here today
Ministers and Cabinet Members Colleagues present here today
Representative of Dr Githinji Gitahi, Global CEO of AMREF Health Africa and Co-Chair UHC2030 and Member of the Governing Board for the Africa CDC
Deputy Minister of Health in South Africa, Dr Joe Phaahla
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Afternoon

We bring to you warm greetings and best wishes from the people of South Africa and our leader, President Cyril Ramaphosa.

The Government of South Africa is committed to address the inequities that have existed before our independence in 1994. Health is one of those sectors with some gross inequalities where 87% of our population depends solely on public health system, which has meagre resources compared to the private health sector, which services only 13% of our population.

At the global level, since the adoption of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, every other industrialised country in the world (with the exception of the United States of America, - and many developing countries) – have implemented universal health coverage systems. Such systems ensure that all persons within their borders enjoy their right to healthcare. In 1966, years after passage of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN proposed another treaty including healthcare: the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural and Rights. The Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural and Rights further clarified, at Article 12, “the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.” “Health” in this context is understood as not just the right to be healthy and have healthcare, but as a right to control one’s own body, including reproduction.

Article 12 requires that “states must protect this right by ensuring that everyone within their jurisdiction has access to the underlying determinants of health, such as clean water, sanitation, food, nutrition, and housing, and through a comprehensive system of healthcare, which is available to everyone without discrimination, and economically accessible to all.” This treaty was signed by all UN countries, ratified by all countries except three – Palau, Comoros, and the United States of America.

In our continent, All African countries committed to the implementation of the African Agenda 2063, “The Africa we want”. These are all the targets that will assist countries to bring gradual and necessary changes to the lives of the people of this continent.

The government's commitment is informed by our Constitution, which is rights based, and guarantees every citizen rights to which we are entitled, simply by virtue of our humanity. Human rights exist independent of our culture, religion, race, nationality, or economic status. Only by the free exercise of those rights can we enjoy a life of dignity. The very frailty of our human lives demands that we protect this right as a public good. Universal health coverage is crucial to the ability of the most marginalised groups of any population to live with dignity. Without health we do not live, let alone live with dignity.

To be specific, Section 27 of the Bill of Rights in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa considers healthcare as a fundamental human right:

"Everyone has the right to have access to healthcare services.... The state must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of each of these rights." (Section 27 of the Bill of Rights, South African Constitution, 1996)

The real meaning of this right to healthcare requires that all of us, acting together as an international community and society, take responsibility to ensure that each person can exercise this right. As individuals, we have a responsibility to contribute to making health care available to each one. We have a right to the actual healthcare envisioned in the Sustainable Development Goals.

As leaders, we can no longer stand on podiums such as this and the fact that *of all the forms of inequality, injustice in healthcare is the most shocking and inhumane.*

In South Africa, the current Administration is committed to move with speed to bring the necessary changes and reforms that will ensure the restoration of the dignity of our people. Universal health coverage is one of the key commitments which our Government committed to during the 74th United Nations General Assembly and the High-Level meeting on Universal Health Coverage which was held in New York, in September this year. The implementation of the Political Declaration, which was adopted in New York, will be the vehicle to bring real changes on the ground.

In my country, health reforms are a priority even to the first office. As Government, we are cognisant of the role that the other sectors and stakeholders are required to play in order to achieve the goals set before us. In that case, the President convene a Presidential Summit in 2018, bringing all key players – Civil Society, private sector, academia, Non-Governmental Organisations and government to say what role can each play to address the challenges in the health sector. This culminated to signing of the Compact in July 2019, by all leaders of the sectors outlined above. The Compact is anchored by nine action driven Pillars which indicators which we can be able to measure progress made in each of the nine identified areas.

The National Health Insurance is a funding model that is seen as a vehicle that will help us achieve universal health coverage. We believe that once we address funding aspects, we will have dealt with one of the major causes of inequities in health. To date, there is the National Health Insurance Bill (2019) is now taken in the hands of the Parliament and the Portfolio Committee on Health is going through the towns and villages facilitating broader consultations on the Bill. This is one of important processes that ensure that the voices of ordinary people of South Africa are taken on board as the laws are been developed. We are hoping that the legislative processes could be finalised soon in order to support the work that has already started.

Therefore Universal Health Coverage is a must have in our case.

What we do today accounts to what our world will be tomorrow. Let us strive for *Health For All in Our Life Time.*

On behalf of the Government and ALL the South Africans,

I thank you!

Siyabonga!

Asante sana!