



Message to Competition Authority Staff on World AIDS DAY

By Thula Kaira, CEO

CA Offices, 1st December 2015

Bakaulengwe, ke a dumeditsa ka Pula!

The general theme for Botswana, between 2011 and 2015 for World Aids Day has been; Zero New HIV Infections. Zero Discrimination. Zero AIDS Related Deaths. A lot has been said by people like myself in leadership on how everybody should avoid new infections, discrimination and also prevent AIDS related deaths. This top down language may itself have negative effects in the fight against HIV/AIDS. I believe that at the centre of this fight should be concerted efforts towards behaviour change, with the leadership taking a self-evident and unambiguous good example in walking the talk.

On this basis, I would like to focus on the issue of leadership attitude towards HIV/AIDS. Leadership can easily isolate itself from the fight against AIDS in various ways. These include messages that are targeted at downstream people and not leaders themselves; not creating an environment where people do actually feel safe and secure to express their affliction or connection with HIV/AIDS. With the benefit of hindsight, I believe that the primary role of leadership is to create an environment that is effortlessly able to address all the HIV/AIDS throughout the year.

As an obvious representative of the leadership of the Competition Authority, I have noted that no one has ever opened up to me on their status and only two people have shared stories of how their relatives have been affected. Clearly, out of over 30 people, this is a very small if not negligible number and it has got me thinking as to where we could have got it all wrong. I have followed keenly the quick replenishments of condoms in the gents' washrooms and considered that preventive measures were being undertaken. I trust this is the same in the ladies washrooms, which for obvious reasons I have never ventured into.

However, I must admit that I am not sure whether as a leader, I have created a secure and safe space for anyone to come to me and offload their burdens related to HIV/AIDS or other close-to-the heart problems. In fact, I must admit that I have created a wall that has been difficult to penetrate by many who may have wished to open up. I wish to apologise for this and I seek your forgiveness.

The subject of HIV/AIDS has remained a non-discussable issue at all meetings: staff, management and Board. At least from where I am standing, it is a topic I speak about once in a year, i.e., on 1 December. The approach has also been one of stony silence as I speak, without feedback thereafter as to whether what I said was of any value or importance. This of course, shows that as a leader, I have not created this kind of atmosphere. Forgive me.

I recognise that Jesus did not just preach to people, he also listened to people. Even in a crowd, a woman was able to crawl through the crowd to reach him and get the audience that no one was ready to give. For fellow leaders at the CA, I urge all of us to get this lesson from Jesus: an approachable, compassionate, non-judgmental, humble, and loving personality. This, I believe, is the spirit we should aspire to have if at all AIDS talk at the Authority and elsewhere will not just remain a 1st of December event.

I wish to thank you for your attention and seek your assistance to assist us to be more responsive in a proactive way as leaders and also to ensure that we do not consider ourselves as speech makers only but be an example of good Shepherds in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

A Modimo o le thuse!