



Violet Banda
Closing session speech

Embargoed until 15.30 AEST, Friday 25 July, 2014

Ladies, gentlemen, and fellow youth, it gives me great pleasure to have this opportunity to speak at the end of this conference, and I thank the organisers for inviting me. At such moments you wonder how fast the days have gone and you wish a few more days could be added. However what is important is not how long we sit to discuss best practices but what action this translates into when we return home.

The conference addressed issues that affect all people from different walks of life. But the common denominator that brought us here is to respond to the great epidemic of the century. Seeing the passion and effort that individuals have committed to the cause, I realise that the hope of eliminating new HIV infections, ending stigma and discrimination and stopping our brothers and sisters of dying due to AIDS is not just a dream.

As a young person living with HIV, I will go home to assure my fellow youth that yes there are people who care out there. What I as a young person have experienced is something I do not wish on anyone else. I was born with HIV and have experienced stigma all my life. Discrimination and the shame of living with HIV must come to an end. This conference marks a new beginning in my life and I hope it is the same with all of you.

We heard this week about an assessment of WHO guidelines on prevention of vertical transmission in Africa. Where there is COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT in programs, retention rates of women diagnosed as positive during pregnancy are greatest. This conference has shown that science alone will not eliminate HIV. We need meaningful engagement of community to break down stigma, in particular the involvement of young women with HIV, who are MOST affected by this pandemic.

I also want to pay respects to our dear friends who were on their way to this conference and met with a tragedy that cut their lives. We take comfort in the knowledge though, that yes, they too wanted to make a contribution towards achieving the three Zeros. You can make a difference in your community when you get back so that they did die in vain.

The work we came for does not end here, it continues as we return to our communities and help make a difference. As we plan to meet again in Durban, I hope some of the people employed in this HIV industry will be made redundant and find new jobs, like in the construction industry, changing ART clinics into schools for young and healthy people. Slowly, but surely moving towards ending HIV.

I hope that in 2016 the voices of young people will be loud and strong. On behalf of all people living with and affected by HIV, I welcome you to Durban. Thank you so much.