

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
ON
HIV TESTING, COUNSELING AND TREATMENT
BY THE HON. MINISTER OF HEALTH, DR CHILUFYA

Mr Speaker, I thank you most sincerely for according me this opportunity to render a ministerial statement on the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) testing, counseling and treatment, the famous *Tipima*. Before I begin, allow me to congratulate the Clerk of the National Assembly on the ratification of her appointment and also express confidence that she will take Parliament to greater heights.

This also demonstrates the confidence that President Edgar Lungu has in women to occupy high offices.

Mr Speaker, on 15th August, 2017, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Zambia, Mr Edgar Chagwa Lungu, made a landmark pronouncement announcing that Zambia had shifted from the passive voluntary counseling and testing to HIV Testing, Counseling and Treatment (HTCT).

Mr Speaker, I wish to inform the House and nation at large that Zambia is currently implementing the universal routine HTCT in public and private health facilities. HIV testing is the gateway to HIV prevention, treatment, care and other support services. Peoples' knowledge of their HIV status through HIV testing services is, therefore, crucial to the success of the national response to bring the HIV epidemic under control.

Mr Speaker, the policy of offering immediate treatment to everyone diagnosed with HIV provides three major benefits, namely:

- (a) the quality of life is improved as opportunistic infections will not be there;

- (b) forestalling progression of individuals from their asymptomatic HIV diagnosed status deteriorating to develop Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). In other words, stopping the progression from just being asymptomatic HIV infested to AIDS; and
- (c) new infections will be averted because those infected will achieve viral load suppression and, therefore, drastically reduce, if not zero, the chances of transmitting HIV from an individual who is infected to the next person who is negative.

Mr Speaker, the new approach of offering treatment and care to persons infected with HIV after diagnosis allows Zambia to pursue the United Nations (UN) Joint Programme on AIDS (UNAIDS) led 90/90/90 Campaign, which is translated as 90 per cent of persons living with HIV knowing their status, 90 per cent of persons who test positive to HIV being started on treatment and 90 per cent of those on treatment achieving viral load suppression to undetectable levels. In other words, test and treat combines both primary and secondary prevention of HIV.

Mr Speaker, allow me to give a bit of background. In the 1990s and early 2000s, before the era of Anti-Retroviral Therapy (ART) in Zambia, HIV/AIDS was seen as death sentence that was affecting millions of individuals and their families. Communities were plagued with funerals every day. It threatened the very foundation of society that resulted in millions of orphans and hampered socio-economic development and breadwinners were taken away. At that time, it was impossible to speak of an HIV-free generation.

Mr Speaker, an AIDS-free generation must have three important elements and these include:

- (a) virtually no children are born with HIV and they remain HIV negative throughout their childhood;