

General Declaration adopted by 4th TAC National Congress

By *moderator*

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We celebrate the End of Denial ? Time for a Genuine Partnership against HIV and AIDS!

Mobilise all of South Africa behind implementation of the NSP!

Campaign for dignity, equality, health and life!

Between March 14-16 2008, 550 delegates from TAC branches across South Africa participated in the TAC's 4th National Congress held at the Birchwood Hotel in Ekurhuleni. In keeping TAC's principles of PWA and women's leadership, the majority of delegates were people living with HIV and women.



In 2005, at our 3rd national Congress, TAC noted the need to continue to campaign against government supported AIDS denialism and to build pressure for implementation of ARV treatment programmes, against the resistance of the Minister of Health and President. By contrast this Congress took place in a new mood of hope, created by the adoption

of the National Strategic Plan (2007-2011), the restructuring of SANAC, and the commitment of the new ANC leadership to urgent and effective campaigns to combat HIV. Indeed, at the Opening Rally of the Congress a call for a partnership with TAC was made by Dr Zweli Mkhize, an ANC NEC member and chairperson of the ANC's health and education committee. This was echoed by the Deputy President, Mrs Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka in her closing address. TAC delegates responded unanimously to the call for a robust and honest partnership of common purpose by agreeing that TAC will work tirelessly with the ANC and the government on urgent prevention and treatment campaigns, particularly at district and local level. TAC does not seek conflict. However, TAC will maintain pressure on the government, whilst trying its best to avoid conflict. We will participate actively in SANAC and other structures. But advocacy, lobbying and mobilization remain necessary.

Delegates called on the government to also rebuild unity with health workers and scientists, many of whom have also been alienated by almost a decade of denialism. TAC therefore called on government to urgently resolve current disputes over AIDS policy, stop the victimization of certain doctors, create mechanisms to quickly resolve disputes that may arise in future, and unlock key policy issues that are delaying and undermining implementation of the NSP. TAC agrees with Dr Mkhize that HIV infection is deeply embedded in the social fabric of economic and gender inequality. But we believe that, with leadership and will, the social fabric can be changed. In particular, we are terrified by the levels of rape and violence against women and the inability of the criminal justice system to do anything about it. We call on all our allies to work together and develop a strategy to change this.

Congress also called for government to seriously debate the introduction of a Chronic Disease Grant, as proposed by the NSP.

In particular the Congress identified the following challenges:

NSP:

The TAC Congress regards the NSP as a great step forward. But South Africa is already behind on implementing its plans and activities. An estimated 350,000 people are on ARV treatment, but this is still far behind the target of 530,000 by the end of 2008.

But most worrying is the absence of a coherent approach to HIV prevention and the high rates of infection.

These problems are worsening the crisis of health and of the health system. We call on the ANC, Parliament and the government to urgently evaluate the leadership of the Ministry of Health, and either replace it or instruct it to act according to ANC and government policy.

SANAC:

The TAC Congress reaffirms its support of SANAC. We congratulate Deputy President Phumzile Mlambo Ngcuka for her leadership during 2007. There have definitely been strides forward in this area. However, there is a need for clear political commitment and support to SANAC. We call again for SANAC to be made accountable to the Presidency. We also call for SANAC to be made a statutory body. AIDS is going to be a part of our lives for decades to come. Billions of rand are going to be spent to save lives and mitigate the social effects of the epidemic. That is why we need SANAC to be given a clear legal mandate and the resources to lead our country.

A Proper Plan to Support and Expand the Public Health Care Workforce:

Doctors, nurses and health workers are labouring under an enormous burden of caring for the ill and dying. The TAC Congress called on the labour movement to lead a 'Jobs for Health campaign'. We must identify the real human resource needs of the health system, not just for health professionals but also for auxiliary staff who are needed to keep health facilities clean and secure. TAC calls on the government to revisit the 2006 Strategic Framework for Human Resources for Health, and to develop a short term plan to deal with the most pressing problems. TAC will forward the resolution on task-shifting to the government.

Tuberculosis (TB):

TAC is extremely concerned about the continuing weakness of our country's response to TB. In particular, MDR TB and XDR TB pose a new and serious threat to people living with HIV and to health workers. Certified TB deaths have increase from 22 000 (1997) to about 74 000 (2005). These deaths have included workers in health services.

TAC notes the TB Strategic Plan adopted in 2007, but believes it is inadequate. This plans falls far-short of TAC, clinicians and scientists discussions with Acing-Health Minister Jeff Radebe. We call for an emergency TB plan, with short term measures to contain MDR and XDR TB. This needs to be discussed urgently with the government and the ANC. Although we respect and recognise the new climate of co-operation, if there is not progress on this issue within

six weeks, TAC will instruct the AIDS Law Project to commence legal action. However, we are optimistic that this will not be necessary following the Deputy President's support for an urgent meeting on this issue.

PMTCT:

On March 12th 2008 a report on maternal, infant and child mortality was published. It showed that South Africa is one of the ten worst countries in the world for children and mothers. 75,000 children die every year before the age of 5. This is a horrific blight on our democracy and society.

TAC endorsed the SANAC civil society initiative on PMTCT (improving maternal health, promoting safe feeding practices, promoting HIV testing of women and their male partners). We commend the faith-based sector for their leadership on this and call for a massive campaign. This initiative aims to use the month of April-May 2008 to organize activities in all sectors and parts of South Africa to raise awareness of mother to child HIV transmission and of health services that can reduce the risk.

This campaign will be a test of SANAC. We call on the Ministry of Health to throw its full weight behind it. We were inspired by the support for the campaign provided by the Deputy President during her closing address. TAC will join this campaign as a priority immediately after Congress.

In conclusion, the Congress acknowledged the sacrifice and commitment of TAC's thousands of volunteers over nearly ten years, and remembered our many volunteers who have died of AIDS or been injured or murdered as a result of gender-based violence. We also express our solidarity with the people of Zimbabwe against the dictator Mugabe. We demand that human rights violations of Zimbabwean refugees and asylum seekers in South Africa stop immediately. At this Congress TAC was stronger and more united than ever. A new generation of community leaders are ready to build TAC in the next decade. We will stand by the Constitution, work with our government, but not shy away from holding it to account and challenging it when ever necessary. There can be no future for South Africa if we do not fight for life and dignity of people with HIV and women.

END OF DECLARATION

TAC's New Office Bearers (all were elected unopposed)

Chairperson Ms Nonkosi Khumalo 074 194 5911

Deputy Chairperson Revd Teboho Klass 076 692 9583

General Secretary Ms Vuyiseka Dubula 082 763 3005

Deputy General Secretary Mr Zackie Achmat 083 467 1151

Treasurer Elect Mr Nathan Geffen 084 542 6322



From left to right: Deputy-President Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, TAC General Secretary Vuyiseka Dubula, TAC Deputy-General Secretary Zackie Achmat, AIDS Law Project Director Mark Heywood.

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