

**South African AIDS Conference 2003
Plenary - Nevirapine
Prudence Mabele: Living with HIV
August 6, 2003**

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MODERATOR: -- I just want to say to all the women in this room, I salute you, this is our month. Let's go back home and continue to strengthen the people living with HIV, with or without the treatment, we will continue the fight for treatment. To all the leadership out there, the males, people like Zachie Achmat, people like Judge Edmond (Misspelled?), people who stand up very tall as males as a forefront of fighting for treatment, I also say from people living with HIV AIDS, we salute you. Also, with great pleasure to thank Professor Jerry Coovadia for being a very good listener and an organizer when we stood up and we said you are all here to talk about us and we are amongst you and it's like we are not here, thank you for giving us a voice. I am also a mother living with HIV and have a four-year-old son who's also living with HIV. Now as a mother, (unintelligible) PMTCT as a mother I may not be so fortunate because in the next coming few days because a decision might be taken that says Nevirapine shouldn't be given anymore. I am going to introduce a speaker, a woman I greatly respect, Ms. Prudence Mabele, who's the director of Positive Women's Network and the coordinator of Positive Act. She's also a new center member at (unintelligible) representing people living with HIV AIDS. She is also a member of TAC in Namibia.

Ms. Prudence, the house is yours.

PRUDENCE MABELE: -- Good afternoon ladies and

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gentlemen. Thank you to Angie for giving me this opportunity.

First of all, I'm standing here because I'm representing the black woman of South Africa who comes from the Township. I grew up in Benoni and I was raised by my grandmother who was struggling a lot, who sold potatoes and fruit to raise me and make sure that I'm a better woman and I'm a woman who could go to school and come back and be a breadwinner and help her. I want to say to all of you unfortunately when I was nineteen, when I started going to the Techniquan (Misspelled?) looking out for my career, I got infected by my boyfriend, whom now he's (unintelligible) and he died of an accident, but he was living with HIV and I want to say from that time, I look back then, it was in 1991, and now it's 2003, I look back at that nineteen year old person and the woman today. But the nineteen year old then had no choice, had no choice--the choice was taken away, she got that news then there were no HIV counseling support groups and everything else and we had to sit down together with many of the people and make things happen. And I agree that things have changed, but now, today, I want to just talk about what really needs to happen, especially regarding a woman who lives and who you know shares the vision of our South Africa. That we need everyone to allow us to truly have choices, especially when it comes to reproductive rights and also choices of a human right for a woman. So one of the things that I want to say when I took a decision in 1995 not to

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have a child, it was quite painful because I've seen Ms. Hylamella (Misspelled?), who was my friend, when (unintelligible) going through her own child who was sick everyday when we walked those steps together when I saw her. The Department of Health people would agree and they know because we worked there our (unintelligible) we moaned, we stayed together, we looked, it's true as a single mother, looking at them go see her own child who then left us because (unintelligible) didn't have any choice. I chose not to have a child because I was too afraid because I knew if I had a child then it would know nothing but I say thank you to scientists today that they went back and looked slowly and researched and then came back to us with a new drug called Nevirapine and I want say again to a woman, even a woman who doesn't have food, who doesn't have anything, if it has something to do with saving their own children, even Nevirapine, if it was said to prevent of that drug would save their child from getting the virus, a woman would chose the 2% (unintelligible) but now that we know that 50% really would choose their changes of a woman getting from getting infecting from HIV women really say a lot would and they would even and they are taking to preventing the child. What I want to say however all of these things exist and the fact that we talk about empowerment of people living with HIV, and people, especially women living with HIV, we're talking here stigma, we're talking here discrimination, we're

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talking here poverty, that has been abused so many times.

Every time is talking, people are talking about nutrition.

They say we need nutrition. I fully agree, but nutrition is not a substitute of Nevirapine, neither HIV, nor anything else,

even prevention. We need to also look at what we say to

anybody. Olive oil is there and the garlic is there, but I

want to say again if there's two bottles, even as a woman who's

working, if there's two bottles, there's an olive oil and

there's a sunflower oil, I take sunflower cause I can only

spend 7 (unintelligible) in sunflower and olive oil is 99. So

let's start, all of us in this room, saying our facts right, in

terms of if olive oil is expensive, what are we providing to

support a woman. Where is the nutrition? If the nutrition also

is something that we have to use, why only the fish, why only

those soy (unintelligible) and the (unintelligible) that is

supposed to help the woman. Let's truly look deeper in the

nutrition, what do we mean? And then also, implement, let's do,

let's act, let's stop talking. This is our lives, as women live

with HIV, it's not a political game. You know we suffer. And

there's one thing also that I want to say to you, our women and

our men are very angry in the townships everywhere, because

they want something. They want to see a change. They want to

have access to treatment. They want to be there for their

children. Today, I can say, there are women here who are

wearing name tags and even if they wanted to stand up, they

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could stand up, they're wearing name tags of people who have died, who were planning to come to this conference, and couldn't make it because of you know the fact that they can't even access the drug. We are talking offense, we are talking all of those things. We have left the issues out still because we just keep talking. Can we truly really do, because what is needed is for us to do something it is for us to stop pointing fingers and making our lives a political game. I tell you, I'm waiting, and I'm waiting and I'm looking and I'm looking, and I say again and again, you'll see. Prior to the election, the maybe even this Nevirapine, I'm talking to you, Embassy, I'm talking to you Department of Health, I'm talking to you the government, our government, probably you will release the drug, but I want to say that other of our members, even at TAC, about 900 have died in this period while we were waiting from when we went to the streets and we've marched till today. Our members are dying and that is what is making me angry. I'm an angry person who will not stay silent who has refused to let people like you with so much resources with so much skills to help South Africa to move. If we're talking Haiti, a country that had nothing, they are sad (unintelligible), but they've made, why can't we make it? If we're talking that mothers are saving their babies, I want all of you again to go to, step for the future, and look at the mother to child, that tape at the resource unit, there are so much women there who are just

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younger women, who made it because they took the Nevirapine, and today they are happy, their children are not infected. I want to say really, enough is enough, and let's stop playing the political card game, especially with other people's lives. I, myself, am standing here. You almost lost me this year in January. I was sick. My cell count went as far as 70, and when it was 70, I was unable to do anything I was just sitting sick and doing all of those things. This would come, that would come, but I tell you there's someone who sponsored me to take (unintelligible) today I can stand here and talk to you. I have gained weight. At that time I lost 45, I mean I lost 10, I was 45, now I'm 55 that is cagey. At that time I had all kinds of things, thrash, you name it, temperature, now I'm able to do everything. I want to also say I have been given a chance to still look after my siblings and my grandmother and work and so many women like me have been empowered even at support groups level they are making those (unintelligible) that you see in (unintelligible) that you are selling. They are trying to make the economy and they are trying to do everything that they can they are being empowered by all of you here but they are not being given a chance leave and look after their child.

I'm talking today about Martin (Misspelled?), all of you would know that guy, he worked in Namibia, he has died and now the wife just died the four children are just sitting in

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(unintelligible) none of their people are there to help. And I'm not just talking cases, people that we know, people that we spend time, people that they are brothers and sisters, people that you say they are poor, people that you say they live in the shacks, all of those equality and gender based violence and all of those things that we all hear you know talking as intellectuals and we are also saying we are pleading we are being stigmatized. That's why today I'm standing here I don't have a baby yet because that was my choice was I can not, until I see the Nevirapine and many other things. Issues here is not their drug, these programs have changed women's lives and have given woman choices. I still pled, MCC, the government, please give us a choice. I'm asking for leaders of black women who are living with HIV to be given a chance, the stigma is killing us, the discrimination (unintelligible) we have been called people with AIDS, PWAs. I don't have AIDS yet I am living with HIV. My cell count from 70 has moved to 300 and something now. The viral is antitachable and I want to say the side effects may be there for any of the person who uses the drugs for the first time yes I have experienced it for two months but coming out of that today, it's easy. (unintelligible) We are so ready, we talk about things in meetings and we're doing everything else and I want to say again take away the undermining of the positive living person. A woman who live with HIV is not that stupid especially when a statement was said we were insulted we

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are being influenced by external outsiders how can anybody influence me with my life, this is my life this is any woman's life who would stand firm and fight for our lives. So please let's build each other instead of destroying one another, if I am being influenced by any of you for this life, for fighting for Prudence, who has the responsibility, who's a breadwinner I want to say it means this country then we were influenced to put the government there and I will repeat it means we were influenced by outsiders to change and take the students to the streets to say to hell with Africans, I want to say we will go anywhere we will do anything that we survive and that we empower and we fight for the drugs because we have see the drugs have changed people's lives and I want to say again in Zulu (foreign language). I'm not the same woman who stood in 1991 today and I was empowered by some of you (foreign language) I know but I need to speak because I will never have this chance again and I don't want to come here again and talk about this. I want to just go and say where are we how are we training everybody else to be ready to implement the drugs. I don't want to go and do civil disobedience (foreign language) some people have told me that (foreign language) and I will go to the streets if no one is prepared (foreign language)

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