

**Newsmaker Interviews: Solly Mokoetle  
XVI International AIDS Conference  
August 12, 2006**

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**JACKIE JUDD:** Thank you so much for joining us today. You are going to be a part of a media panel discussion at the conference. What is the message that you want to deliver here at this conference?

**SOLLY MOKOETLE:** Well, the message we want to communicate is a message of hope, a message that Africans are capable of being able to help themselves with the help of the world. We as media broadcasters have come together to formulate a pool of resources from Africa of broadcasters that wants to be a vehicle of communicating new messages coming from Africa on how they are combating and dealing with this pandemic of HIV and AIDS.

**JACKIE JUDD:** This is a new group of several dozen broadcasters brought together with the help of Kaiser, I should say.

**SOLLY MOKOETLE:** Well, this is a group which calls itself African Broadcast Media Partnership, which is under the auspices of the Global Media AIDS Initiative that was started by the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Of course, yes, we are assisted by The Kaiser Foundation, and we have

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already held our own sessions in Africa to devise our own strategies and our own framework of how we are going to be able to bring about a new message of hope in Africa. What we are saying, we need to dedicate resources, our own resources as broadcasters first and foremost.

Then secondly, we need to give away air time. More air time, about 5-percent of our air time, of our daily programming, about 18 hours - 5-percent of 18-hour broadcasts - dedicated specifically towards new communication of HIV and AIDS messaging.

**JACKIE JUDD:** Has there been a determination, Solly, about what kind of messaging works to the target audience, in this case, young people?

**SOLLY MOKOETLE:** Yes, what we have established is that young people have become very bored and tired of messages that have been communicated about HIV and AIDS so far, because the approaches and the methodology have been somewhat sometimes condescending, somewhat very boring - for example, in the form of political statements and press conferences and et cetera. And what we are saying is the communication of HIV and AIDS messaging has to be in everyday life of the youth. It should not be just public service announcements, PSAs, which are important. I'm not saying we should abandon them, but they

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should see that in the drama that they watch, in the lifestyle magazine shows that they watch, in the soaps that they watch, and we have succeeded to do be able to do that. To begin to embed and inculcate HIV and AIDS messaging within the everyday programming that people watch as young people.

So we are saying we need to change the manner in which we communicate. The messaging may well be the same. It is about prevention. It is about treatment. It is about changing your lifestyle, but how do you communicate it is the key.

**JACKIE JUDD:** How do you, number one, define success? How do you measure success in a media campaign?

**SOLLY MOKOETLE:** Well, the definition of success obviously has to be how the amount of people who are responsive to your messaging and, of course, whether it does have an impact at all or not, in changing their lifestyles.

The uptake has been very slow so far in that people have got the messaging, but they have never changed their lifestyles. But research has also established that once we begin to change the messaging, you are capable of seeing some significant results. A recent survey that has been conducted by the Nelson Mandela Foundation, as well as the Human Science and Research Council in South Africa, demonstrated that at least there is now a very, very big awareness within - for

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example, in South Africa - amongst the youth. The prevalence rate is beginning to taper off. So we are beginning to encourage though, ourselves by the research that was seen in this continuous monitoring by organization such as The Kaiser Foundation to see whether these messages are actually having an impact.

**JACKIE JUDD:** Isn't it difficult to establish the cause-and-effect relationship between a media campaign and behavior change?

**SOLLY MOKOETLE:** It is true that it could be very difficult to have an empirical determination. However, the papals of our campaign are intended to have a lifestyle and attitude in our change, and I think those are measurable. When that happens, we then ask yourself, how else would that information have been communicated that would have led to a lifestyle or attitude of change?

It can only be through media messaging, through information sharing, through education, which vehicle exactly may be difficult to determine. But there is no doubt that there is no way you can change people's attitudes unless they are willing for it.

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**JACKIE JUDD:** The South African Broadcasting Corporation is, by and large, state funded. Has that ever made it difficult for you to deliver the AIDS messages that you've wanted to through the SABC, given the position of the South African government regarding AIDS at different periods of time?

**SOLLY MOKOETLE:** Well, not necessarily. I think there is a very distinctive point we need to be aware of about the nature of the SABC. The SABC is a public service broadcaster. In other words, that it regards itself to be more answerable to the public, more than be answerable to government, or to the state. It does not regard itself as a state broadcaster.

Indeed, since 1994, the successive boards of the SABC have tried to actually extricate itself and its way of waking from being seen to be a state broadcaster. In that sense, it is expected that at certain times our communication or the messaging that we communicate may not necessarily be consistent with what government says. However, it is exactly what the public out there wants. We regard ourselves to be subject to the needs and requirements of the public.

Now, I don't necessarily believe that there is a conflict in any case in what we communicate with what government says. There may well be some interpretation that is different, and an emphasis on a difference in emphasis, but I think it is within the interest of the government to see

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messages being communicated to the young people of South Africa to ensure that we are able to stamp out this pandemic of HIV and AIDS.

**JACKIE JUDD:** But where are there pockets of resistance that you find when you talk about this notion of mainstreaming the AIDS message in the media through the media?

**SOLLY MOKOETLE:** Well, I mean, you find people saying that they don't want – for example, I'll give you a typical example. In South Africa recently, we had a drama production which was called "Yizo Yizo," a very, very strong hard-hitting drama, which was showing relating life in the prison, and of course talking about infection of and the spread of HIV and AIDS among prisoners. Now it was so hard, so upfront and so direct that many people were rudely awakened to that reality. It is a reality that everyone knows is happening, but they just never expected it.

This is exactly what we are saying, that we as a national public broadcaster, it is our responsibility to push the envelope, to present function that is on cutting edge and is going to make society to stop and ponder and ask questions.

Another kind of information that has become standard – Right now, for example, in South Africa and in Africa in general, the youth have become so used to messaging of HIV and

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AIDS that people take it for granted that when you are young, you are going to die at the age of 36. That the lifespan of anybody who is an African is going to be 36. Well, we are saying, "No, it is not so." It is not a given that you have to die at the age of 36. You can be able to prevent. You can be able to get treatment. You can be able to combat HIV and AIDS. And so we are using new methodologies of communication and new vehicles to communicate the message of hope and the message of an ability to fight back.

**JACKIE JUDD:** A final question. My guess is that when you are speaking on your panel, there will be a lot of broadcasters from every part of the globe listening to you. What is the single take-home message that you want them to leave that room with?

**SOLLY MOKOETLE:** It is that media messaging must change. We need to listen more to our young people about how they want to be communicated about this HIV pandemic, and I think that the whole world must begin to stop.

Let me just give you an example. I was just thinking yesterday on the flight. I was going through London and went through one of my worst and harassed troubles, and I have trouble all the time, as I was going through London. I was thinking if the whole world can be so focused about the fact

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that there is some terrorist who want to blow away 12 planes, that would probably kill, let's say, a million people, well, I think the world is right to do so. But consider this for a fact: That just this past year, more than 2.4 million people died of HIV and AIDS in Africa. That, I was saying to myself it is 10 times the people that were killed by 9/11 bombing. Ten times 9/11. Wouldn't that make anyone want to stop and say, "Let's unite our efforts to do away once and for all with this pandemic"?

**JACKIE JUDD:** Thank you very much.

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