

Address delivered by  
UN SPECIAL ENVOY ON AIDS FOR AFRICA  
Ms Elizabeth Mataka

REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN AND  
COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

20 JUNE 2008

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Hon Minister of Local Government and Housing, Hon Silvia Masebo  
Hon Minister of Gender and Development, Hon Patricia Mulasikwanda  
Members of Parliament  
Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Members of the UN family  
Equality Now  
NGO Leaders, the Board, Tasintha programme, Invited guests  
Participants from different countries present here  
Members of the Press  
Ladies and gentlemen.

I am delighted to be here with you this evening, and honoured to be invited to participate in this important event.

As the UN Special Envoy on AIDS I have committed to using my position to draw attention to what is perhaps Africa's most compelling issue of our time: the HIV epidemic.

Tonight, I would like to lend my voice to a seemingly new and quickly emerging issue that is devastating so many countries on the African continent: **Human trafficking**.

Human trafficking has been defined as the illegal trade in human beings for exploitation. Ladies and gentlemen, human trafficking is **modern-day slavery**.

The victims of human trafficking are often lured by promises of a 'better life.' but instead of this better life, what the victim is presented with is deception or coercion into a life of commercial sexual exploitation, domestic servitude or manual labour.

Several of the countries in this region, including many if not all of the thirteen countries represented here, are regarded as countries from which traffickers 'source their victims' and/or are regarded as 'transit countries' through which

women and children from other countries are trafficked, and/or are regarded as the destination country that victims are trafficked to for exploitation. Which means that all of us here are impacted by this modern-day slavery.

Aside from trafficking across international borders, evidence shows that women and children are trafficked to areas within national borders. They are often 'recruited' or 'sourced' to work in homes as domestic servants, or as cheap manual labour on farms, or for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation. Often family members of the victims are complicit often inadvertently handing them over into this exploitation.

What perpetuates this trafficking of people? Often it is perpetuated by poverty, a lack of awareness and often that elusive desire for a better life.

Tonight, Hon Ministers, ladies and gentlemen, we are gathered here under the important theme of: '**Trafficking of Women and Commercial Sexual Exploitation**'. This focus propels our continued fight to safeguard our women and girl children into a new gear, this marks a turning point in our fight against HIV, STIs, gender inequality and trafficking in women.

The theme of this conference is very closely intertwined with the HIV epidemic. Numerous reports and research findings have been published, underscoring the linkage between trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, and HIV. However, this has failed to be reflected in our national plans and programming on HIV.

Hon Ministers, ladies and gentlemen, HIV is perhaps one of the biggest challenges of modern time. HIV devastates individual households and ravages whole communities, it is forcing us to re-examine our attitudes towards sex and pleasure, equality, culture, human rights and so forth. We know that HIV is inseparably linked to poverty, and that poverty contributes to increased vulnerability to HIV, especially of women.

In the recent past our focus on the drivers of the HIV epidemic in Africa has intensified. We have begun to ask ourselves why the epidemic is seemingly more difficult to contain in sub Saharan Africa, particularly among young women.

Studies have found that the vulnerability of communities is also inextricably linked to poverty. Currently, several of our countries have a large majority of our population living on less than a dollar a day. We know that poverty and gender imbalances are among the drivers of the HIV epidemic and of trafficking of women. Many victims of trafficking are trafficked into forced labour which is very often forced sex work.

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to share an important finding from the International Organization for Migration. Research by IOM notes that not all women involved in the sex industry are women who have been trafficked,

however, a vast majority of females trafficked, especially across national borders, find themselves sexually exploited and thrown into brothels or forced to work as sex slaves. IOM underscores that these women find themselves exposed to a higher risk of contracting HIV, STIs and other reproductive health problems. Furthermore, while condoms are often readily available and women are well informed of the benefits of using them, the pressure not to do so is often high.

This Conference is a principal turning point for this particular area as the thirteen participating African countries gathered here in Lusaka are here to break new ground, share experiences and find lasting solutions to this problem, which is not only complex but is also sensitive.

Addressing poverty and gender imbalances will have dual benefit. Adequately addressing the two root causes will bring us closer to understanding and therefore ending trafficking of women, commercial sex exploitation and HIV. No country is immune from the threat that these issues pose and without a collective effort, our goal of ending trafficking in women, and its associated ills, will remain an elusive goal.

Hon Ministers, ladies and gentlemen, human trafficking can exist within a country's borders. The United Nations warns internal trafficking of women and girls is far more prevalent. Victims are often unknowingly recruited from depressed areas, villages and shanty townships and moved to urban centres for the purpose of exploitation. HIV increases the vulnerability of those whose situations are already precarious. Orphans and widows are extremely vulnerable and usually are victims of trafficking and/or commercial sexual exploitation.

Hon Ministers, ladies and gentlemen, it is the recognition of the vulnerability of women to HIV that prompted The Global Fund, not to continue with 'business as usual' in their funding mechanisms to countries. I am pleased to report that, in the Round 8 Call of 2008, the Global Fund put special emphasis on gender. The guidelines for Round 8 of funding encouraged countries to include gender in their applications, ensuring that Gender is included in all country proposals.

The challenge therefore is for all of us here to identify the root causes of trafficking of women and commercial sexual exploitation. It is pertinent that we work to put in place strategies and activities that actually yield results. It is well acknowledged that good work attracts funding!

Let me take advantage of the many countries present here today to say the following: It is my expectation that this meeting produces

- 1) a joint proposal addressing trafficking of women and commercial sexual exploitation; and
- 2) common strategies and activities that specifically target border areas.

In closing, allow me to underscore the importance of this meeting on the lives of our the women. Today could be a turning point for us the women based on what you resolve today. Today can open a new chapter in the way we design our HIV intervention programmes and the way we address inequalities and trafficking of women. Together we can make a marked difference in the lives of so many.

I ask that you work closely with UNFPA who has been identified by the UN family to provide leadership on the issues around commercial sexual exploitation. Zambia has an added advantage in that the UN in Zambia has formed a new joint programme on human trafficking which comprises the International Organization for Migration as the lead agency. International Labour Organization and UNICEF are identified as the co-leading agencies. I implore you to take full advantage of the support that the UN family can provide.

I would like to acknowledge the support that *Equality Now* has given to this conference and ask them to keep up the good work.

Hon Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish you fruitful deliberations.

Thank you.