

MEDIA RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE ISSUE

STOP TB – BECAUSE YOU CAN!

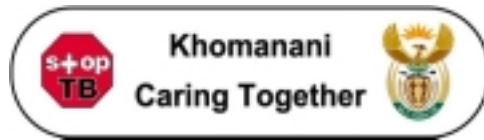
Johannesburg, 17 March 2003 – “ My Mother should have taken her tablets. It’s through her that I am sick,” insisted Jaco Joseph, a 12-year old boy with multi-drug resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB).

In a series of recent events aimed at raising awareness about tuberculosis (TB), the Minister of Health, Dr. Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, addressed dignitaries during a special preview of the documentary “Precious breaths, South Africa’s needless deaths”.

The documentary features stories of TB patients in South Africa including the testimony of the young Jaco Joseph. It will be aired on SABC 3’s Special Assignment at 21:30 on 18 March 2003.

Dr Tshabalala-Msimang urged every South African to watch the documentary, which will help to understand South Africa’s needless TB epidemic and help the country avoid needless deaths. She said that it was tragic that South Africa remains one of the 22 high TB burden countries and emphasised that the real cataclysm lies in the fact that people are still dying from the disease while it has been treatable for the past fifty years.

The Minister said that TB control measures cannot be effective without the necessary resources and announced that the Department’s proposal for their TB/HIV initiative was approved by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. More than R8 million will be made available for this initiative over a period of two years.



“As a country, we are taking all the necessary steps to ensure the reversal of this scourge. Our TB control programme intends to raise the awareness around the treatment and curability of TB. People seem not to know that TB treatment is free and that TB can be cured. We are also addressing the problem of many patients not completing their treatment regimens, resulting in the unnecessary spread of the disease,” she continued.

The Minister announced the South African theme for World TB Day during the preview. World TB Day will be commemorated next week on Monday 24 March 2003 in Port Elizabeth, and the theme is “Stop TB, because you can!”

On 24 March, Dr Tshabalala-Msimang will also launch the government’s Social Mobilisation and Advocacy TB campaign, aimed at assisting South Africa to reach global targets set for effective TB management.

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Issued on behalf of the Department of Health / National TB Control Programme

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