

Speaking Notes: Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, Minister
Department of Health, South Africa
End TB Campaign Media Workshop
Sandton Hotel, Johannesburg
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[Opening]

Honoured guests, members of the media, health professionals, civil society representatives, and all our valued partners in the fight against TB,

I am pleased to be here today, addressing a group that has the power to influence public awareness, drive social change, and hold decision-makers accountable—the media. You are not just reporters of news; you are the bridge between government, communities, and individuals. Your words, your stories, and your investigative work shape how South Africans understand and respond to public health challenges like tuberculosis (TB).

We are gathered here today because TB remains one of the greatest public health crises of our time. Despite medical advancements and a concerted global effort, it continues to claim lives, deepen inequality, and burden our health system. South Africa carries one of the highest TB burdens in the world, and while we have made great progress in expanding access to diagnosis and treatment, we still face significant challenges that require urgent action.

[The Burden of TB and HIV in South Africa]

Let me begin by laying out the facts. South Africa continues to battle a dual epidemic of TB and HIV, with both diseases remaining major public health threats.

South Africa is among the 30 high TB burden countries identified by the World Health Organization (WHO). In 2023, we recorded an estimated **270,000 new TB cases** and around **56,000 TB-related deaths**. That equates to about **153 deaths each day** every day. TB remains one of the leading causes of death in our country. In fact, TB is the leading cause of death among people living with HIV, and the two diseases fuel each other.

With **8 million people living with HIV in the country**, approximately 55% of TB patients are also HIV-positive, making co-infection a significant challenge. While South Africa has made major strides in increasing antiretroviral therapy (ART) coverage and expanding TB screening and treatment, major gaps remain.

It was estimated that **66,000 people with TB in South Africa went undiagnosed** and untreated in 2022. These individuals continue to spread the disease unknowingly, contributing to ongoing transmission. Similarly, despite the success of the national HIV programme, approximately **1.1 million people living with HIV are not on treatment**, leaving them at risk of serious illness, including TB. The National Department of Health (NDOH) has prioritized closing these gaps by intensifying case-finding efforts, strengthening treatment adherence, and ensuring no one is left behind.

[The End TB Campaign and 1.1 million Campaign]

The **End TB Campaign** is a national effort to expand TB testing, and ensure that every person with TB is identified and treated. By **scaling up testing to 5 million people annually**, we could reduce new TB cases by 29% and TB-related deaths by 41% by 2035.

Simultaneously, the **1.1 Million Project** is dedicated to **finding and linking the missing 1.1 million people living with HIV to treatment**, propelling South Africa on the path to end AIDS as a public health threat.

The project leverages community-based testing, differentiated service delivery models, and innovations to make HIV care more accessible.

These two campaigns are **designed to work in synergy**. Given that TB is the leading cause of death among people with HIV, these joint efforts will ensure that individuals are screened for both diseases at every point of care. The **End TB Campaign and the 1.1 Million Project will strengthen health system coordination, promote integrated community outreach**, and ensure that those who test positive for one disease receive immediate screening and treatment for the other. This will enhance TB case finding, improve TB treatment coverage hence closing the gap between TB cases found and the estimated number of people with TB.

At the heart of these campaigns is a **commitment to ensuring that no one is left behind. Early diagnosis and treatment will not only save lives but also prevent ongoing transmission, protecting families and communities**. The campaigns will focus on **reaching high-risk populations, strengthening awareness and education, combatting stigma and misinformation** to encourage people to seek care without fear.

[The Role of the Media in the End TB Campaign]

The **End TB Campaign** that will be launched by the Deputy President of the Republic on the 24th of March 2025 **is a call to action—a national movement** to accelerate our response to TB and rally all sectors of society in the fight against this disease. It is needed because **despite be most single killer disease (killing more than HIV and malaria combined)** TB is often **overlooked, misunderstood, and underfunded**, despite being preventable and curable. If we are serious about ending TB as a public health threat, we must **break the silence, fight stigma, and encourage early testing and treatment**. This campaign is about **taking TB out of the shadows and into public conversation**. But to succeed, we need your help.

The media is **one of our most powerful allies** in this campaign. Your platforms shape public perception, create awareness, and influence action. You are essential in **helping us reach communities with accurate, life-saving information about TB.**

We are asking you to **elevate TB in the news cycle.** TB should not only be covered once a year on **World TB Day.** It must be part of **daily health reporting,** integrated into discussions about **poverty, inequality, and public health responses.**

Specifically, we need the media to:

- **Encourage TB testing** by running stories that emphasize early detection and treatment success.
- **Fight stigma** by humanizing TB through personal stories of survivors and those affected.
- **Dispel misinformation** about TB transmission and treatment.
- **Hold leaders accountable** for ensuring TB remains a health priority in South Africa.
- **Promote TB prevention efforts,** including household contact tracing and TB preventive therapy.

We are committed to supporting the media in this effort by providing **access to TB data, expert insights, and training opportunities** to improve the quality of TB reporting.

[TB a biosocial disease]

While the End TB Campaign prioritizes expanding access to testing and treatment, **let us remember that TB is a biosocial disease**—it is not just a medical condition, but one driven by **poverty, inequality, and systemic challenges.** TB thrives in overcrowded homes, poorly ventilated workplaces, and communities with limited access to healthcare.

Malnutrition weakens the immune system, making people more susceptible to TB, while job insecurity and financial hardship make it difficult for patients to complete treatment. **Stigma and discrimination** further isolate those affected, preventing them from seeking care and allowing the disease to spread. If we are to truly **end TB, we must go beyond just testing and treatment**—we must tackle the underlying social and economic conditions that sustain its transmission.

This means ensuring that people diagnosed with TB receive not just medical care, but also **nutritional support, social protection, and mental health services** to help them complete their treatment. The media has a crucial role to play in **shifting public perceptions, reducing stigma, and educating communities** about TB as a curable disease, not a source of shame. To **end TB, we need a whole-of-society response**—one that improves living conditions, strengthens healthcare access, and provides dignity and support to every person affected by this disease.

[A Call to Action]

As we move forward, let me leave you with this: **TB is preventable, treatable, and curable—but only if we take action together.**

To the public, I urge you: **Get tested if you have a persistent cough or any TB symptoms. Encourage your family and friends to do the same. TB testing and treatment are free at public clinics, and early diagnosis can save lives.**

To our partners in civil society and the private sector: **Help us bring TB services closer to communities. We need you to continue advocating for stronger policies, better funding, and more innovation in TB care. Your contributions, whether through community programs, research, or funding, make a significant difference.**

And finally, to you—the media professionals in this room—I **ask you to be champions for TB. Use your platforms to educate, to investigate, and to inspire action. Let us work together to ensure that TB is no longer a neglected disease, but a national priority.**

Despite challenges, I remain hopeful. We have the tools, the knowledge, and the commitment to end TB in South Africa. What we need now is the collective will to act—boldly, decisively, and without delay.

Together, we can turn the tide. Together, we can **End TB.**

Thank you.