

Welcoming Statement at Masoyise Satelllite session: 6th SA TB Conference

Mr Nikisi Lesufi, Minerals Council South Africa

Thank you, Programme Director, Professor Zungu

Representatives from Masoyise partners and stakeholders, delegates from the United Nations family, organized labor, representatives from the state, members from the mining sector, and all distinguished guests, good morning.

On behalf of Masoyise Health Programme, a multistakeholder initiative led by the Minerals Council South Africa, and the Mine Health and Safety Council, I welcome you to this Parallel Session on *“Putting the Brakes on TB and HIV in the South African Mining Industry, amidst the Covid-19 pandemic.”*

We are proud to provide this platform that will focus on two diseases that have plagued the world, the country and the industry for a long time, TB and HIV. We are also cognisant of the UN High Level Meeting on AIDS that will be taking place from tomorrow, 8th -10th June in New York. We welcome that member states will undertake a comprehensive review of the progress on the commitments made in the 2016 Political Declaration towards ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030, and that new concrete commitments to accelerate action to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030 will be made.

The current situation in our lives reminds us of the past pandemics like the Black Death that occurred around the years 1346-1353. The Black Death was the most fatal pandemic recorded in human history, causing the death of 75-200 million people in North Africa and Europe.

The 1918 Influenza Pandemic, also known as the Spanish Flu, was not to be outdone. This pandemic lasted from February 1918 to April 1920, and it infected 500 million people in 4 successive waves. The death toll of this pandemic is estimated to be about 50 million.

Today we are facing a raging pandemic in the form of SARS Cov 2 which causes Covid-19. To date, almost 3,7 million people have died from the disease worldwide. Besides the cases and deaths, the pandemic has resulted in major disruptions to existing health programmes.

Tuberculosis has been a challenge over the course of human history, because of its severe social implications. It has always been associated with high mortality rate over the centuries. TB is a serious threat, especially for people who are co-infected with TB and HIV, because HIV weakens the immune system which makes it harder for the body to fight TB germs.

A good fight was launched against TB and HIV in the South African Mining Industry through Masoyise Health Programme, with its focus on TB, HIV, Occupational Lung Diseases and Non-Communicable Diseases. In early 2020 however Covid-19 changed our way of living, and it nearly disrupted the good work that was done over the years in containing and combating the deadly infection of TB and HIV.

This parallel session builds on the High Level Masoyise Seminar held in October 2020. At that seminar Dr Lucica Ditiu, the Executive Director at Stop TB Partnership, reported in her presentation that the Stop TB Partnership in collaboration with Imperial College, Avenir Health, John Hopkins University and USAID had carried out a study which found that global TB incidence will increase by 7 million, due to the Covid-19 epidemic. This was a consequence of a 30-40% drop in TB testing.

In light of this study and declines that we noted in the reporting and performance of our companies on TB and HIV, Masoyise Health Programme decided that it is time to *put brakes on TB and HIV infections in South African Mining Industry amid Covid-19 pandemic.*

We have an impressive lineup of speakers for today. Please join us as we unpack the work that has been done so far in putting brakes to new infections and to also get input from you so that together we can come up with collective strategies to prevent our people contracting TB, HIV and Covid-19 infections.

Once more, I welcome you all. May you have fruitful deliberations.

Thank you.