

Treatment Action Campaign Statement on the ANC National Conference and Leadership Election

By *moderator*

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At its National Executive Committee (NEC) meeting today, the TAC discussed the African National Congress leadership election and its implications for HIV prevention, treatment and care in South Africa. TAC leaders expressed their personal preferences. However, the discussion focused on matters of principle rather than personality and took place in a free and open climate.

The NEC agreed again that the TAC will not endorse either ANC President Mbeki or Deputy President Zuma. We will seek to work with whoever is democratically elected, and will formally request an urgent meeting with the new ANC leaders after the election.

However, we wish to make the following statements with regards to both the election process and its outcome.

1. The ANC leadership contest has created space for an important national debate, which has at its heart an assessment of the performance of the ANC leadership over the last 10 years, particularly in terms of improvement in the lives of the poor. The TAC believes that through denial and delay the government of the last ten years has allowed hundreds of thousands of avoidable deaths due to HIV/AIDS. We call for an honest recognition of this and for the ANC Congress to return to its 1997 resolution which resolved that an AIDS awareness campaign 'spreading correct information' on HIV should be led by the 'President of our organisation'. The President of the ANC was to 'direct' the 'NEC, Branches, the Youth League, the Women's League throughout our Provinces to place the campaign against AIDS on their day to day agendas'. This resolution has not been implemented.
2. The AIDS epidemic affects women drastically. It is intertwined with the unacceptable level of sexual violence against women and children and the failure of the criminal justice system or politicians to stem this horror. TAC opposes any opportunistic exploitation of the issue of gender. Equal political representation (so-called 50/50) is a vital principle that must be defended. But it is not enough. South Africa must measure the ANC's commitment to gender equality by the implementation of programmes to stop and successfully prosecute rape and domestic violence, as well as by programmes that target poverty among women and girls. We call on the new ANC leadership to devise and implement a national programme of action on gender and to make this a presidential priority.
3. TAC is of course concerned about the continued explosion of the AIDS epidemic, and the subsequent drastic rise in mortality, and particularly maternal mortality. We are also concerned that, during this period, the independence and oversight of a whole range of statutory bodies that could have improved the response to HIV/AIDS was eroded, including Parliament, the Medicines Control Council, SCOPA, SANAC etc. We call for the new ANC leadership to commit to the independence of key statutory institutions and to establish an independent, non-partisan all-party parliamentary committee on AIDS to work with SANAC and maintain independent political oversight of our national response.
4. Over the last ten years there has been a wholesale deterioration in the quality of health amongst people in South Africa. Although, since late 2006, there has been an improvement in government-civil society collaboration on the national AIDS response, it is still insufficient. We commend the efforts of Deputy President Phumzile Mlambo Ngcuka

to rebuild unity between government and civil society and look forward to her continued leadership of SANAC. But we call on the new ANC NEC to urgently create a new leadership in the Ministry and Department of Health and to make health a political and social priority under closer scrutiny of both the ANC NEC, and the Cabinet. We also call on the ANC to strengthen the Health Portfolio Committee in Parliament.

In conclusion we wish the ANC success with this vital congress. We call on delegates to the Congress, and the newly elected leadership, to ensure principled unity on a new programme of action to make South Africa a better country for all.

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