

TAC Electronic Newsletter

By *moderator*

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Message of condolence to Minister Jeff Radebe and the family of Ian Phillips

The TAC extends condolences to the family, friends and comrades of the late Ian Phillips, advisor to Minister of Transport and Acting Minister of Health Jeff Radebe. As a lifelong ANC activist and member, and in his work with government, Ian Phillips remained committed to his life-long ideals of freedom, equality and dignity for all people. The premature loss of Ian Phillips is a tragedy for the reconstruction and transformation efforts of our country.

We salute the openness of Minister Radebe, Mr Phillips and his family regarding his HIV status in a time of their private grief.

The TAC encourages everyone to get tested for HIV early. Finding out your status before your CD4 count drops below 200 or you develop serious opportunistic infections is the best way to ensure long-term survival with the disease.

[END OF MESSAGE OF CONDOLENCE]

Report on NUM Strike at Impala Mines

Compiled based on reports by Pholokgolo Ramothwala (AIDS Law Project) and Luckyboy Mkhondwane (Treatment Action Campaign)

In March, TAC and the AIDS Law Project sent Pholokgolo Ramothwala and Luckyboy Mkhondwane to meet the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) Rustenberg Region who had organised a strike at Impala Platinum in North West Province.

NUM gave Impala Platinum a memorandum on 17 February describing their demands. The company's employees subsequently went on strike but are now back at work pending the outcome of negotiations between the union and management. One of the complaints is that the Impala Platinum health facility has not been providing antiretroviral treatment to all workers requiring it.

According to NUM, two to three years ago a memorandum was issued by the mine management which stated that all people who need antiretrovirals would get them for free from the mine. The problem started when a programme called Impala Medical Plan was introduced. This plan required any person who needed antiretroviral treatment from the mine health facility to be on it, but it also required workers to pay a fee. Effectively, without being on the Impala Medical Plan (and paying the fee), workers could not get treatment. NUM claim this requirement was not authorized by the mine management. NUM has held the doctor in charge of the programme primarily responsible for this setup and he was suspended following a NUM strike demand that he be dismissed.

Furthermore, according to NUM there are over a thousand workers who were dismissed because they were too sick to do their jobs [time period not specified - ed]. NUM alleges that in the weeks following the start of the strike five workers committed suicide. They left suicide notes that suggested that their deaths were somehow linked to their HIV status. The current acting doctor in charge is making progress. But the miners are still not satisfied that antiretrovirals are being provided efficiently enough.

A task team has been established to investigate all the allegations made by NUM in their memorandum. The North West Department of Health in North West is also helping to resolve the problems.

Here are some facts about Impala Platinum provided by NUM:

- The mine has 20 000 workers in the Rustenberg area.
- 10 000 live in a same sex hostel.
- People who are not at the hostel stay in informal residents with no running water, toilets and electricity.
- Some rooms have 16 men sharing.
- The company does not have an HIV/AIDS policy.

NUM intends to examine Anglo Platinum's HIV/AIDS programmes next, which some NUM members informed us that they are dissatisfied with. Workers will march to the Anglo Platinum head office on 21 April. The demands will include proper housing for miners and a review of their HIV/AIDS health services.

On 22 March, Pholokgolo Ramothwala presented to NUM Rustenberg Regional Committee on the work of ALP and TAC. We explored ways to work together. This will include training on legal and treatment issues.

We attempted to get comment from the Impala Platinum spokesperson before running this report but he has yet to respond.

[END OF NUM/IMPALA PLATINUM REPORT]

Challenge by people living with HIV to Criselda Kananda

Ms. Criselda Kananda

2 April 2007

Dear Ms Kananda

CHALLENGE TO RELEASE DETAILS OF YOUR HIV TESTS

In City Press on 24 February, you wrote that you sometimes test HIV-positive and sometimes test HIV-negative. If this is the case, then there is something highly exceptional about your body. Usually how one gets tested and who conducts the test is one's own business. But you have made public statements about your personal status and in so doing you have once more questioned whether HIV causes AIDS and the accuracy of HIV tests. We therefore challenge you to make the following public by providing them to the Southern African HIV Clinicians Society (SAHCS):

- The actual rapid test strips you used.

- The facility where you got tested and the testing health worker.

- A copy of your ELISA test result.

We would also request that you please consent to be tested again by researchers at the National Health Laboratory Services.

We trust you will agree that this is of interest to science and your contribution would therefore be most welcome. The SAHCS is the best organisation to evaluate this exceptional situation and why it is occurring. Indeed, it might be of value to finding better treatments or even a vaccine for HIV. However, if you are unwilling to meet our challenge then we request that you stop using your personal example to confuse people about the cause of AIDS, the accuracy of HIV tests and the importance of antiretroviral treatment.

Yours sincerely

Gordon Mthembu

Nokhwezi Hoboyi

Georgina Booyesen

Pholokgolo Ramothwala

Hazel Tau

Zackie Achmat

Luckyboy Mkhondwane

Denis Matwa

(All people living openly with HIV)

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