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Minister Hogan meets with TAC activists in Bloemfontein while many patients continue to wait for treatment in the Free State

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As of today (Thursday 5 March), 7 of the 28 ARV sites in the Free State are still not initiating new patients onto treatment.

Critical shortages in essential healthcare services and equipment continue. At Pelonomi Hospital in Bloemfontein, doctors have been using stationary stickers to close drips because they have not had access to vital medical equipment.

On Friday 27 February, TAC activists, led by Sello Mokhalipi, picketed outside the city hall in Bloemfontein. They held placards stating: 'Budget + antiretroviral treatment prolongs HIV-positive people?s lives'; 'Please don?t forget people living with HIV/AIDS', 'We want, we need and we demand treatment', and 'Stop the shortage of ARVs'.

COSATU and other civil society organisations supported the picket. No government officials responded to the demonstration, which was widely covered by the press.
Today in the Free State, an important meeting was held with civil society and government officials. In attendance were Minister of Health, Barbara Hogan, Free State MEC for Health, Sakhiwo Belot, Free State Head of the Health Department, Pax Ramela, and local representatives from NGOs (including TAC) in large numbers.

At the meeting, Hogan promised that the remaining 7 clinics would all be given access to ART by 1 April 2009.

A civil society meeting is planned for 11 March in the Free State. There, the reaction of civil society organisations to the ongoing crisis in the province will be co-ordinated and formalised.
TAC activists must continue to monitor the availability of ART in the Free State and in their districts.
TAC will continue the struggle for comprehensive healthcare for all, and will not allow the crisis in the Free State to be sidelined or forgotten.

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