



**Press Release  
For Immediate Release  
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## **Cabinet Committee of Ministers on HIV and AIDS meets to discuss way forward for HIV response in Zambia**

Five Cabinet Ministers, chaired by the Minister of Health, Hon. Simbao, met in Chisamba for two days to discuss the status of HIV and AIDS in the country and to consult on the path forward. The Ministers heard presentations from the National AIDS Council and its cooperating partners, on the status of the epidemic, the national response and financing of the national response. Key issues were highlighted including the new evidence around the need to reduce on the number of people having multiple and concurrent sexual partnerships and increasing the number of men and boys who are circumcised. The challenge of financing the response to HIV continues, especially the high cost for buying the drugs to keep the current 220,000 people on ARVs, as to scale up the programme from the current 66% coverage up to 80% coverage of providing ARVs to those who need them. Finally, there was discussion on the need to operationalise the decentralization policy to make the scale up of the multisectoral response to HIV to all corners of the nation.

Discussion was heated around the ways to scale up the prevention response to HIV. It was agreed that poverty and HIV are still very linked, but the link is on the mitigation of HIV, and less so of poverty causing HIV. In other words, the evidence shows that HIV is more common among people who are mobile, educated and urbanized. However, once someone is infected with HIV, HIV can make them fall into poverty. HIV makes families and children vulnerable.

Evidence was presented on the important role that male circumcision plays in helping to reduce the risk of HIV infection among men. It was agreed that male circumcision needs to be only one part of the prevention programme, but that it plays an important part and that it should be scaled up. People should be sensitized on the benefits of male circumcision and services should be made widely available. The house was informed that the Ministry of Health is working on a plan to scale up the male circumcision programme to reach 50% of all men and 80% of all new born babies by 2020.

The issue of financing the national response to HIV and AIDS was discussed extensively. It was agreed that the current situation of relying heavily on donor funding is unsustainable. The Ministers agreed to work on ways to broaden the funding base,

including greater GRZ funding, as well as looking at creative ways to develop a sustainable funding mechanism.

The house was also treated to a preview of the OneLove Kwasila campaign, which will be launched June 16. The cornerstone of the campaign features a television miniseries illustrating multiple and concurrent sexual partnerships. A lively debate followed the preview, including the conclusion that the most important outcome of a programme such as this is to provoke the population to discuss the issue of multiple and concurrent partnerships and the elevated risk of HIV infection associated with it. The meeting closed with a motivational presentation from which the Ministers felt compelled to fully engage themselves and their Ministries to address the current needs in the national response to HIV and AIDS.