

Candlelight Memorial 2024: A Night of Remembrance in Rusape

Figure 1 ZNNP+ Executive Director, Mr. T. Makoni giving his welcome remarks during the Candlelight Memorial.

On the evening of November 30th, the town of Rusape was illuminated not just by flickering candles, but by the collective spirit of resilience and remembrance. The Candlelight Memorial, organized by the Zimbabwe National Network of People Living with HIV (ZNNP+), brought together a diverse group of stakeholders, including representatives from the Ministry of Health and Child Care, National AIDS Council, the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), and community members, all united in honoring the lives lost to AIDS over the years.

As the sun set, participants gathered at Vengere Hall, the atmosphere charged with both somber reflection and hope for the future. Candles were lit, symbolizing the light of those who had passed, and the flame of awareness that continues to burn in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

The ZNNP+ Executive Director, Mr. Makoni, spoke passionately about the importance of remembrance,

“Tonight, as we light our candles, let each flame represent a life—a life that was cherished, a life that was loved, and a life that continues to inspire. We remember those who lost their battle with AIDS, and we honor the tireless efforts of those who have dedicated their lives to supporting people living with and affected by HIV. Their compassion and commitment light the way for us all,” he said.

Figure 2 Guest of Honour, Chief Director, DR. M. Hove, on behalf of the Minister of Health and Child Care, Honourable Dr. Mombeshora, lighting candles on the day

As the memorial progressed, attendees listened intently to speeches highlighting the ongoing challenges faced by people living with HIV. The speech read on behalf of the Minister of Health and Child Care, Dr. Douglas Mombeshora by Chief Director, Dr. Maxwell Hove during a Candlelight Memorial Commemoration, highlighted the strides the government of Zimbabwe has made to transform the healthcare landscape in the country,

“Our government is committed to ensuring equitable access to healthcare for all. We are implementing policies that prioritize education, prevention, and treatment, while also addressing the social determinants of health that contribute to the spread of HIV. We have signed COMPACT to ensure the government continue to prioritise treatment even when external support is significantly reducing. Together, we can build a future where every person living with HIV can thrive without fear or discrimination,” he said.

The chairperson for the membership of people living with HIV, Mr Marshal Makorovodo, shared his sentiments,

“As we remember those we’ve lost, we must also acknowledge the progress we have made. Advances in treatment and care have transformed HIV from a death sentence to a manageable condition for many. Yet, significant challenges remain. Stigma, discrimination, and systemic inequalities still hinder access to healthcare, education, and support for countless individuals,” he highlighted.

The event was not just about loss; it was also a celebration of resilience. Stories of survival and strength filled the air as community members signed the memorial quilt, fostering a sense of solidarity among those present. The candlelight flickered, casting a warm glow on faces filled with determination.

In that moment, the candles burned brightly, illuminating not only at Vengere Hall in Rusape but also the hope that one day, no one would have to mourn a life lost to AIDS. The Candlelight Memorial was a poignant reminder that while the journey is long, together, we can turn the tide against HIV and AIDS, ensuring that every life lived is cherished and every voice heard.