



## Endorsement of Child Trauma conference

by Justice Edwin Cameron

“South Africa has in recent years taken significant strides in curbing the HIV/AIDS pandemic. According to the 2015 UNAIDS report, South Africa has the largest antiretroviral treatment programme anywhere in the world. This means that over 3.4 million people have quality lives, are productive citizens and can provide and care for their families.

Especially important are programmes preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV. These have had heartening success. They have reduced overall child mortality between 2002 and 2012 enormously (20%).

We celebrate these successes.

But we remain humbled by the huge challenges too many still face. This is particularly the case with our children.

AIDS has orphaned more than two million children in South Africa.

We know that these children are vulnerable in many ways -- to abuse and exploitation, too often sexual.

Children find themselves obliged to exchange sex for food and shelter. This in turn makes them vulnerable to contracting HIV, if born without the virus. Too many are also living in poverty and unable to access quality schooling or social services.

The sexual abuse of children in South Africa remains a distressing but surmountable challenge to our country's health and well-being.

The Optimus Foundation found in 2016 that one in three South African children will be sexually abused before age 18. Sadly, while resources are primarily aimed at protecting girl children, the sexual abuse of boys exceeds that of girls.

A trend that is not well known is that many children are sexually exploited by other children. Childline estimates that as many as 4 out of every 10 children who report sexual abuse are abused by other children.

Many young people in our country show behaviours and attitudes that make them exceedingly vulnerable to HIV. Young people are increasingly becoming sexually active at a younger age. Almost 1 in 5 boys will become sexually active before they turn 15. Many young people believe that girls find sexually aggressive boys attractive and that young people in relationships should not refuse each other sex.

But all these problems are surmountable. The 9<sup>th</sup> annual trauma conference in June 2017 will make a significant contribution to addressing the special challenges South African children affected by HIV/AIDS face - and will present evidence that prevention of child sexual abuse and prevention of HIV/AIDS cannot and should

The conference will address hopeful and constructive strategies, making this an indispensable meeting for child carers, physicians, healthcare providers, activists and administrators.”

Justice Edwin Cameron

Johannesburg

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