



ACTION TODAY, A FOUNDATION
FOR TOMORROW:

THE PRESIDENT'S
EMERGENCY PLAN FOR AIDS RELIEF

Second Annual Report to Congress





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Cover photo:

Nkonzo, a participant in the U.S.-supported "Men As Partners" program, practices what he preaches so he can serve as a role model to his younger brother, Mzwakhe. This is Nkonzo's story as related to staff at the U.S. Embassy in Pretoria, South Africa.

Supporting My Family with Love and Respect

One quiet evening in Soweto, a loud bang on our door frightened us. We knew it was him—my father. We didn't want to let him in or he'd beat up my mother. He demanded, "Vulani, vulani!" (Open up!) We froze. My mother, sisters, brothers and I didn't know what to do.

He used to come home smiling. Whenever we heard his knock, we knew he had gifts for us and threw open the door for him. I was his first-born, so he spent extra time with me. I don't know what happened to that kind father. Now his life is ruled by alcohol and led to a divorce. He disappeared.

I kept all those childhood memories with me. When I was 16, my Mom passed away after giving birth to my youngest brother, Mzwakhe. No one knew why or what happened. I was still trying to get used to her not being around when my eldest brother (from another father)—our family's sole breadwinner—got shot and died delivering food for the bakery where he worked.

I became a hermit. I earned money by doing "izikorobho" (painting, tiling and things like that). I found a way to survive. I had to grow up on my own, but I wanted to be there for Mzwakhe. Today, I spend time with him, helping him with his homework, taking him to parks and sharing with him what I do at work—teach men to respect women. He believes in me. He looks up to me as a father figure.

And it's funny. Our father showed up after many years. Strangely, I managed to find peace with him. We have become friends, but he has no say in my life. He lost his job, so I give him money. I support four sisters, three brothers, nieces and nephews by planning ahead to pay for rent, food and services. Ten of us live in our four-room house and draw water from an outdoor tap. A brother and I sleep in a shack we built outside. My family and I manage. And we love each other.

I'm helping my eldest sister adjust to being HIV-positive. She denied it when she first found out. But I took her to the hospital. They said she also had tuberculosis, so she got treatments. She's feeling so well, she's looking for a job to support her two children. I look beyond her status and see her as my sister—someone good, caring, loving. I'm proud of her and the strength and courage she shows.

Three years ago a friend invited me to a workshop in my neighborhood, called "Men As Partners." I eventually realized what was wrong in my life, how I could change and what kind of man I want to be. I asked the organizers if I could work with them, even as a volunteer. I became a peer educator, talking to others in my age range about important things, especially gender roles. A guy will tell you he's got HIV or is hurting his Mom or partner or another woman in his life... men need someone they trust so they open up. Yesterday, my best friend admitted his father is violent to his own mom. He'd never talked about it before. Guys who have experienced domestic violence have the choice of stopping it and preventing it also.

People need to do all things as equally as possible. Nobody should be favored or prejudiced by gender, but given an equal chance at home, school and work. Each and every role is meant for both people. Let's understand and accept that and treat each other with respect, fairness and love.

In my job and personal life, I help South Africans learn why it's important to treat women with respect. We should treat everybody respectfully, regardless of gender. This concept is not a goal for me, but a way of life.

I've started a youth group at my church. We deal with threats of daily life. Many people are afraid of getting AIDS. I tell them to abstain from sex before marriage and stick with one partner after marriage. Not everybody finds this message easy to live, but we talk about ways to avoid sexual compromises. Some guys tell us we're crazy and don't know what we're talking about. Others accept it and live safer lives. I hope life will be better when Mzwakhe grows up.

To all of you who have lost your role models, it's up to us to put a stop to this, because someday, we, too, may become fathers. Fathers, be positive role models for your children, especially your sons. You are their spirit, hope and inspiration.

They say a man can change his stars through the help of God. I will be a star for Mzwakhe.