



Speech by

DESLEY SCOTT

MEMBER FOR WOODRIDGE

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PAPUA NEW GUINEA; NATIONAL AIDS COUNCIL

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT (Woodridge—ALP) (11.56 a.m.): My family has had a long and close association with Papua New Guinea since 1987 when we first toured to Port Moresby with the gospel singing group Destiny Singers. During five tours we traversed the country, visiting such places as Mount Hagen, Goroka, Lae, Madang, Bougainville, Kavieng, Manus Island, Rabaul and across to Honiara in the Solomons. It was during these years that my three sons gained their musical experience which has led to their professional careers in the music business. We took our music all over the country, but more than that we arrived with tonnes of clothing, books, school supplies and the like to assist the people there. Air Niugini graciously waived transport costs for this humanitarian aid. We made many friends there and it has saddened us during the intervening years to learn of the increase in crime and lawlessness which has devastated the country. So I was very excited to receive an invitation to attend as a guest speaker at a weekend conference near Port Moresby at the Pacific Adventist University.

Invitations were sent to members of the Adventist Church who were government officials, cabinet ministers and backbenchers in the new government and a number of judges from the Supreme Court. Special guests included Dr Phetsile Dlamini, the Health Minister from Swaziland, Ambassador Bien Tejano of the Philippines and a number of high-ranking church leaders with interests in such areas as health, stress, lifestyle and religious liberty. It was indeed a very stimulating and interesting conference. Of particular interest was the presentation by Dr Dlamini of the HIV-AIDS epidemic in Africa. Swaziland is facing the incidence of one in four of its population being HIV positive. The number of orphans increases daily as both parents are taken by this horrific epidemic. Sufferers are cared for in their village or small community by health outreach workers visiting to assist in the management of cases. There is no money for expensive treatments. However, a fortified powdered food supplement is offered with antioxidants, selenium, zinc and other nutrients to improve the cells' ability to withstand infections. Through education they attempt to decrease the incidence of indiscriminate sexual relationships and promiscuity, to change people's sexual behaviour, to stop child sexual abuse and reduce malnutrition and poverty.

Following the conference, it was my privilege to visit the National Aids Council of PNG with Dr Dlamini to discuss with Dr John Millan the situation that country faces. With a population in excess of 4.5 million and in excess of 700 language groups plus the isolation and inaccessibility of much of the country, they face a daunting task. They may quote in excess of 5,000 cases of HIV positive, but in reality the figure is unknown. They are soon to try to gain a more accurate picture of how their country is faring. Many men have several wives, and, as in Africa, it is not culturally appropriate to discuss sex with children, so there are many barriers to overcome. A number of HIV-AIDS leaflets have been produced and a condom called Karamap is now on the market, produced especially for Papua New Guinea. Translating material into various languages will be the next step. I understand advertisements on the media outlets have come in for some flak, as they have used common street language for sex.

There is a recipe for disaster right on our doorstep. Following our visit to the National AIDS Council we visited the Port Moresby General Hospital and met with the superintendent and senior doctors. With the country in an economic crisis, it is very difficult to meet the medical needs in this hospital. Many medicines are unattainable financially and several diseases such as tuberculosis,

measles and malaria are common. An inspection of the children's wards, the intensive care unit and a medical ward showed a high number of patients with many wantoks by their beds, particularly parents and siblings there looking after the young children.

I detected in the population a great deal of hope that Sir Michael Somare will bring the stability to government which is so needed. Legislation will curb the constant votes of no confidence in the government and stop members changing parties. Legislation will be reversed which has offered protection in the past to members of Parliament suspected of roting and corruption.

Time expired.
