

**THE MERCURY**  
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## Futile HIV Strategy

THIS is the 23rd year of marking World Aids Day, and while the world has taken to celebrating small victories, the sad truth is that South Africa is losing the battle to prevent HIV.

In the absence of an HIV vaccine – a magic bullet that is still many years away – we have a collection of HIV-prevention tools at our disposal, including male circumcision, education, antiretrovirals and a 100 percent effective method – the condom.

There has been a huge change in political commitment from the government in fighting an epidemic which has led to almost 6 million South Africans now living with the disease and, according to statistics, anything between 800 and 1 500 new infections added every day.

Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi has repeatedly indicated that the country simply cannot afford to treat its way out of this epidemic.

As it stands, the country's flagship prevention campaign, Khomanani, has been placed on ice. The government is no longer leading the way in ensuring that prevention messaging reaches people – instead, non-governmental organisations are being left to plug the holes.

President Jacob Zuma launched the HIV Counselling and Testing Campaign with great fanfare in April, setting a target of testing 15 million people by June.

Unsubstantiated figures reveal that so far, 4 million people have been counselled and 3.7 million tested, with 598 000 found to be HIV-positive. The communication around this campaign has been lacking and there are several reasons for this, including a dysfunctional SA National Aids Council.

It is critical to establish what we have done to ensure that the more than 3 million people who tested negative remain negative, and that those who need treatment get it.

The biggest Christmas present we as South Africans can give ourselves is to undergo an HIV test and ensure that if we are negative, we stay that way, and encourage our loved ones to do the same.

Yes, we need our political, religious and other leaders to take the lead, but ultimately we need to take responsibility for our own futures.

We have to have a long and painful battle to ensure that those who are HIV-positive have access to drugs. However, by failing to prevent HIV we are simply mopping the floor without closing the tap.

## Safeguard Information

MANY disclosures of classified information, such as the release of the Pentagon papers in 1971, have served the public interest. The latest document dump by WikiLeaks so far falls short of that noble purpose. The primary objective seems to be to embarrass the US and complicate its foreign policy.

Rather than railing against WikiLeaks, the Obama administration needs to take responsibility for safeguarding information at its source. Some have argued the increased information-sharing among agencies has made it easier for leaks to occur. Whatever the explanation, the government failed in this case – and has suffered for it. – The Los Angeles Times



# Time to stop R370m feeding frenzies

*The elite just cannot understand that extravagant spending is obscene in a country where poor people struggle to meet their basic needs*

IN THE coming weeks, the National Youth Development Agency, known formerly as the National Youth Commission, will be hosting a conference dealing with youth issues.

The conference, a meeting of "The World Federation of Democratic Youth", will cost R370 million, with R29m coming from the Presidency, and is set to attract 30 000 youth from around the world, with 5 000 of those delegates from South Africa, as reported in The Mail & Guardian.

Now we are told that the conference will discuss important issues like youth and responses to imperialism, education issues and youth unemployment, among a host of other issues.

No doubt, these are critically important issues, but there's no way one can justify spending R370m on a conference. One can only wonder what portion of that will be

Leaders of the agency may find it easier to justify R370m, since the chief executive, Steven Ngubeni, earns R1.8 million a year and the chairman, Andile Lungisa, takes home R769 000.

The fish, as an old African proverb says, rots from the head.

Most people in our country are poor and struggle to meet their basic needs.

In 2010, we still have poor children dying of diarrhoea and people burning in shack fires, yet our elites seem unable to understand the obscenity of their spending patterns.

It seems that every sphere of society – health-care, charity, the arts and even youth politics – has become little more than an opportunity for leaders to live like kings while the poor starve.

The agency has no record of achievement. It has made no real contribution to resolving the youth unemployment



IMRAAN BUCCUS

crisis, the epidemic of gender-based violence or the crisis in our schools. It is nothing other than a slush fund for the ANC Youth League, who control it, to build up their power by dispensing patronage.

Influential people, including people like Zackie Achmat of the Treatment Action Campaign, have recently termed the youth league "the most reactionary faction of the alliance".

In recent weeks the league has been breaking up meetings of rival organisations, from a Cosatu meeting in Cape Town to a meeting of the Unemployed People's Movement in the Eastern Cape.

The youth league represents a militant and thuggish commitment to the politics of

patronage and crony capitalism. While Achmat may well have overstated the case somewhat, it is quite clear that while the youth league are not the Green Bombers of Zanu-PF they are certainly a part of the predatory elite within the context of the politically powerful.

And this youth conference has its own dubious history. It comes out of the propaganda machine of Stalinism and continues to include representatives of some of the most authoritarian regimes on the planet like, for example, North Korea.

No doubt the youth league will milk this propaganda opportunity for all that they can to cover their thuggish right-wing politics in a left-wing

glow. But no one in their right mind will be fooled.

The fact is that this R370m feeding frenzy is just obscene in a country where so many young men and women are out of work, living in shacks and have no clear way forward for their lives.

When this is added to the numerous cases of corruption and scandal, we are left with a very disturbing view of our country.

Politics and money have become fused to the point where the party is, as the political philosopher Frantz Fanon wrote all those years ago, little more than a means of private advancement. Fanon also spoke of how the elite will assert themselves in spectacular ways and we certainly seem to have reached that point.

Zwelinzima Vavi is quite right to rail against corruption and mal-spending. It is a great pity that Vavi has indicated that he aims to leave the

union federation to ascend to the ruling heights of political power.

In a post-apartheid context, especially 16 years into democracy, the whole point of politics should be about working together to close wealth gaps in our country – to give everyone a stake in society.

Unfortunately it seems like the dream of democracy has been turned into a panic pursuit of the most obscene forms of conspicuous consumption imaginable for the elite.

Surely the time has also come for us to stop hosting conferences that cost R370m, so we could arrive in sports cars with Breitling watches and carrying Louis Vuitton bags to discuss imperialism and the evils of capitalism.

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E-mail [mercletter@im.co.za](mailto:mercletter@im.co.za), fax 031 308 2715, or post letters to: The Editor, PO Box 47549, Greyville 4023. Letters must carry the author's signature, name and address.

## forum

E-mailed letters should also include a physical address and telephone number. The editor reserves the right to edit or shorten letters. Letters with pseudonyms will only be published in exceptional circumstances.

## Botes and Malema can help us cut to the chase

I HAVE a problem with Max du Preez's column on racism, as evinced by the recent utterances of Annelie Botes (The Mercury, November 30).

He fails to take her genuine concerns into account.

Her fear of being brutalised in the course of a robbery is as real as the endless misery of South Africa's black majority, living under the jackboot of a corrupt government, who then compound that misery by voting the same people back into power at the next election.

Botes is not despicable, any more than an uneducated black out-of-work individual forced into a life of crime is despicable. How Du Preez can hold her successful living in a safe sector of society against her is an example of how screwed-up thinking has become in South Africa.

We either shut down Sandton and all emigrate to Alexandra in sympathy, or amp up our humanist capacity and productivity to raise the standard of living in Alexandra. Were it not for our present government this would have already happened.

In fact, Botes's honesty is refreshing. It gives those of us who are concerned about the real nature of racism, and how it messes society up, an insight into how to genuinely begin the work of ending it.

By unearthing like sentiments from the Julius Malema end of the spectrum

we begin to deal honestly with one another. And the first truth to deal with is that we don't trust the "other" at all. Good. In fact, it is evident that we have a huge problem with each "other".

The right thing to do is to ask "why?" And get away from the drive our society puts up with in the name of our non-existent non-racist society.

To then round on the one successful instrument of government left standing in South Africa, the DA, is further evidence of Du Preez's own insecurity. I can see how he may be trying to substantiate his own hard-won authority to criticise the ANC, by sending missiles aimed at all racism, including white racism.

In the end, it is glaringly obvious that South Africa is going nowhere fast until we have a genuinely inclusive society. If you want to put it in black and white terms, until we grip each "other's" hands in full unashamed brotherhood, we are condemned to useless discourse and worse results.

To do that we need to know exactly what it is we don't care for in the other.

Once that is exposed, and only then, can we begin the journey of life's greatest joy: the discovery of what is miraculous and beautiful about each other.

IAN CAMPBELL-GILLIES  
Durban

## PUBLIC CRUSADE IS NOT WHAT IT APPEARS

JOHNNY Vassilaros's mischievous statement, among several in his letter (The Mercury, November 30), that the approval process for Durban's small-craft harbour was "not by the book" deserves a response.

As Vassilaros is aware, the Environmental Impact Assessment process spanned several years and included several public meetings and stakeholder workshops in informing the final design. Simply because he disagrees

with the final verdict does not make it procedurally flawed.

Legal opinion on the approval, supported by the issuing authority, is that construction on the landward side can commence, subject to eThekweni approvals being in place. These are nearing finalisation.

His plea of affordability conveniently ignores the offer made by the Point watersports clubs,

representing almost 95 percent of water-sports enthusiasts in the area, to house the Durban Paddle Ski Club in their new clubhouse at current membership rates.

The former understand the responsibility they have to their members to safeguard and grow their sport.

In turn, Durban Point Development Company has consistently acknowledged the importance of having a

vibrant water-sport community within the Point Waterfront Development, hence the exhaustive efforts to try to include the Durban Paddle Ski Club.

Observations, over a four-month period, from CCTV footage in the area, have shown that for most of the day there are no cars present at the Durban Paddle Ski Club.

Despite the wide support Vassilaros claims, even on weekends there are seldom

more than 10 vehicles present. The emotive chord Vassilaros's public crusade seeks to strike should not be allowed to disguise the fact that at the end of the day his delaying tactics are simply geared towards protecting the narrow self-interests of a very small group of active members, to the detriment of our city.

NEELS BRINK  
Durban Point Development Company

## Leave beach, Vetch's Pier untouched for everyone to enjoy

IT IS with great sadness that racial issues are being deployed to justify the actions of a few greedy capitalists "How a small group sabotaged small craft harbour plan", (The Mercury, November 26).

Let's beat the apartheid drum. After all that has peacefully been achieved in this country one needs to question the motives for this despicable approach. The truth must be hurting and someone is desperate.

Letter-writer Arthur Konigkramer's reference to "colossal failure" is dramatic. With what knowledge does he make these claims? The open coastline is

considered rough and not conducive to marina construction.

If he has a share-holding in the Durban Point Development Company he should disclose it and, if he does, he should tell the public about the millions he has already made, and what he stands to gain next.

Please also inform the public, specially the indigent and homeless around Durban, of how many millions ratepayers have subsidised uShaka Marine World (circa R1.4 billion) and what the cost is of the present rates moratorium on some, if not all, the properties in the new Durban Point Development

Company development. This also goes into the billions.

It will not go down too well with the starving and homeless. The facts are that the land below the high-water mark belongs to the people of South Africa under the custodianship of the state president. So does the sea bed. The term is "Republica".

Proposed developments appear not to comply with the law of the land. There is a dispute as to the position of the high-water mark.

His facts are twisted. The granting of the ROD and the demarcation of the high water mark are under review in the courts. Why does this disturb

him? We all want the truth, nothing but the truth.

His reference to 20 objectors is laughable. In terms of the social impact assessment, 80 percent of the members of the public that use Vetch's beach do not support the development.

His empty promises of jobs need close scrutiny. After the construction stage, going by the present performance, we the ratepayers will be propping up tax-exempt developments for years to come.

What guarantee do we have that the Point will not develop into the Wheel-type scenario?

Using Durban Point Development Company

statements on the lack of town planning approval, speaks volumes for the proposal. Let the courts decide on the issues at hand. Responsible development landwards of appropriately defined high water marks and erosion or scour lines will be welcome.

The beach as well as Vetch's Pier should be left untouched for all of the people of South Africa to enjoy.

One can only wonder about how many of the previously disadvantaged will be able to afford to see, never mind visit or own, what is proposed.

AM FERREIRA  
Durban

## Keep at it... for they need the dough

THE activist organisations that launched a class action application in the Western Cape High Court against the three biggest bread producers must persist in their lawsuit against them.

Other activist organisations should also get on board because, at the end of the day, Pioneer Foods, Tiger Brands and Premier Foods have been ripping off millions who depend on bread for their survival.

It is not sufficient for the three biggest bread-makers found guilty by the Competition Tribunal to simply pay their fines.

The activist organisations are to be commended for their bid to secure compensation on behalf of the millions of consumers who have suffered as a result of these corrupt business practices.

With compensation, the public – certainly the most needy – would become empowered to be more aware of their rights against mega-businesses who exploit the people and profit from a staple food in these difficult times.

IRSHAAD AHMED  
Durban