A STATEMENT TO MARK WORLD'S HIV-AIDS DAY AND THE CALL TO INCREASE HIV-AIDS AWARENESS - BY HON KWABENA MINTAH AKANDOH, RANKING MEMBER ON THE HEALTH COMMITTEE.

Thank you Mr. Speaker for the opportunity to make this needful statement on the call to increase HIV- AIDS awareness campaign.

Mr. Speaker, December 1st each year is marked as world's AIDS day celebration. As such, yesterday was world's AIDS day. Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is a chronic, potentially life-threatening disease and human immune deficiency virus (HIV) is a sexually transmitted infection (STI). It’s usually spread by contact with infected blood or from mother to child during pregnancy, childbirth or breast-feeding, unprotected sex and sharing of sharp tools with infected persons. There's no cure for HIV/AIDS yet, but there are medications that can dramatically slow the progression of the disease. These drugs have reduced AIDS deaths in many developed nations.

Mr. Speaker, according to W.H.O 37.9 million people are living with HIV globally. In Ghana it is estimated that 333,713 people are living with HIV (PLWHIV), and out of the figure, 117,199, that is 35% are males and 217,514, or 65% are females. Adults who are 15 years and above are 305,199, representing 91% and children aged zero to 14 years are 29,514 or 9%.

Mr. Speaker, the estimates further showed that 16,421 pregnant women needed to be placed on PMTCT (Prevention Of Mother To Child Transmission), while 12,950 are on Anti-Retroviral Therapy (ART) for PMTCT, which means 78.86% of pregnant women with HIV who needed ART are currently on the program. The remaining 3,471 pregnant women are not on the program. According to GAC, Western and Greater Accra Region are leading with HIV infections followed by Volta Region and North East with the lowest infection rate.

Mr. Speaker, According to the Ghana AIDS Commission report, the number of persons living with HIV/AIDS has been on the high increase since 2017. Mr. Speaker, the estimated number of new infections in just 2018 alone was about 19,000. Meanwhile, the methods of transmission has not changed and interest groups have said to be doing awareness campaigns to reduce the prevalence rate.

The theme for this year’s World AIDS Day is "Communities make the difference". This year’s World AIDS Day offers an important platform to highlight the role of communities at a time when reduced funding and a shrinking space for civil society are putting the sustainability of services and advocacy efforts in jeopardy. Greater
mobilization of communities is urgently required to address the barriers that stop communities delivering services, including restrictions on registration and an absence of social contracting modalities. The strong advocacy role played by communities is needed more than ever to ensure that AIDS remains on the political agenda that human rights are respected and that decision-makers and implementers are held accountable. The community is also encourage to give both financial and emotional support to PLWHIV and resist discrimination and stigmatization.

Mr. Speaker, so far, the awareness campaign is low and we must urge each and every one to be an ambassador for the campaign to reduce the infection rate. My concern is that younger people are getting more infected and looking at the time we started the awareness campaign, those in their twenties should not be infected. This also means the target group for education was wrong and we must reevaluate the target age group in the future. According to GAC, high infection rate among young people is due to “high-risk sex.” High-risk sex, is explained as when one has sex with a non-regular partner without protection. Also, there are more young people who engage in multiple concurrent partnerships and some are also involved in serial monogamy. Thus, they switch partners over time and in quick succession and that exposes them to HIV infections.

According to the Commission, HIV testing is an essential step in accessing HIV services.

Mr. Speaker, scientific evidence shows that adherence to treatment affords persons living with HIV (PLHIV) the necessary health to live a normal life and go about their duties like everyone else.

Mr. Speaker, Government’s funding for HIV prevention and control should be reconsidered to enable more resources to be acquired for the awareness campaign. There should also be a zero discrimination campaign against infected and affected persons.

Again, much more efforts should be geared towards zero stigma against infected and affected persons. This is because, many infected persons fail to disclose their HIV status and even do not go for medication due to the stigma attached to it hence infecting others with the virus.

On this note, I commend the GAC for criminalizing stigmatization.

Mr. Speaker, I want to conclude by indicating that abstinence and using protection are still the best modes of preventing HIV-AIDs.

Thank you Mr. Speaker.