



Association of Adventist Women

# Phetsile Kholekile Dlamini-Nkomo

## — Woman of the Year —

### Distinguished Service

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# 2006

Phetsile Kholekile Dlamini-Nkomo, the second of five children, was born into a faithful, Adventist family in Swaziland. A rural farmer, Phetsile's father valued education and sent her to Mbukwane Seventh-day Adventist School, the first Adventist secondary school in Swaziland. In 1970, she completed a B.Sc. degree at the University of Lesotho, and then proceeded to the University of Ghana to study medicine. After completing her internship in Natal, South Africa, she joined the staff of Hlathikhulu Government Hospital, Swaziland, in 1976 and soon became its director. She also directed 22 rural clinics.

"Thereafter, Dr. Dlamini continued her specialization and obtained a master's

degree in pediatrics in 1985 at the University of Witwatersrand, South Africa, and in 1986 a Fellowship Degree with the College of Physicians (pediatrics) in South Africa. Following her return to Swaziland in 1987, she began a private rural practice, bringing health and healing to thousands of infants and children. Six years later,

recognizing her professional standing and community service, the Parliament of Swaziland secondarily (i.e., without standing for election) elected her to this august body. In 1996 Dr. Dlamini was appointed as the Minister for Health and Social Welfare," according to Percy Peters of Dialogue.



Her illustrious career includes serving two terms as Minister for

Health and Social Welfare of Swaziland (1996 to 2003). She is currently an ambassador to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), an entity mandated by the Organization of African Unity and now by the African Union (AU). This organization is "designed to address the current challenges facing the African continent such as escalating poverty, underdevelopment, and the continued marginalization of Africa." At NEPAD she is responsible for coordinating health programs that cross many African countries. An international figure in her areas of expertise, she is the author of numerous reports and policy statements.

Her primary passion is the welfare of the underserved, particularly orphans, vulnerable children, the elderly and disabled. She was part of the research on issues of orphans and vulnerable children and how the HIV scourge in the southern African countries impacts them. Under her leadership, Swaziland has ratified the 1995 Convention on the Rights of a Child. While the government has not yet been able to offer free primary education to all children, the government now provides free text books to make learning more accessible, and offers bursaries for the most needy. In this context, she was also a presenter at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children in New York in 2002 and is the author of a Kellogg Foundation white paper on the status of orphans and vulnerable children.

She has introduced a school health program, making information on HIV/ AIDS part of the school curriculum, and promoted health clubs in all schools to promote peer education and teach life skills for self-protection from abuse and exploitation.

To provide basic justice in her country Dr. Dlamini has participated in the creation of a juvenile court system. And to encourage youth to dream of civic leadership, some of the cities have Junior City Councilors led by their Junior Mayors.

In the last one and one-half decades she has been active in issues surrounding the HIV/AIDS epidemic including prevention, mitigation, and care. She also promotes access to comprehensive care. This has included lobbying at the international level as a government minister (together with her counterparts in other southern African countries) for price reduction of medications that treat HIV/AIDS-related infections in southern Africa. Other multi-country projects in Africa include projects to control malaria, which still is a major killer, particularly of children. In 2000, Dr. Dlamini launched a courageous, anti-tobacco campaign.

Dr. Dlamini's interests include the quality of health care and health care delivery, as well as capacity building. She facilitated health reforms in Swaziland, which include free statesubsidized clinics and health centers throughout the country to relieve very poor families of the burden of paying for medical care and to improve access to health care. This initiative also helps the elderly, who are often left with orphaned grandchildren.

In Africa, the issues of poverty, health, gender, and abuse are closely linked. Phetsile has been a compassionate advocate for enhancing the status of women (who have the legal

status of minors) and girls, who bear a disproportionate share of the burden of illness and poverty and who are often victims of violence and even murder. Since many girls tend to be infected with HIV/AIDS by older adult sexual partners and rapists, she even piloted a health bill that calls for the death sentence for rapists with infectious diseases.

Phetsile has served the church in different capacities. Her main contribution to church policy has been in Adventist education for nearly 15 years as a Bethel College Board member. She has been influential on gender issues, while involved with Adventist Women's activities, and on issues of health and temperance. In 2005, she served on the General Conference Nominating Committee.

She believes in honesty, humility, and sharing whatever resources God has bestowed upon her. At any one time she is paying for the education of at least five or six needy students. She believes that knowledge is power, especially if it is grounded in Christian values.

Phetsile is the mother of two children—a daughter and a son—who are at university.