

Press Release

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Judge Albie Sachs and Prof. Ndletyana open 2016 BHF Conference

The 17th Annual Conference of the Board of Healthcare Funders opened in Cape Town last night (Sunday) with a timely reminder that healthcare in South Africa is not equitable, and it is the responsibility both of the state and of business to ensure that the needs of the people are met.

Setting the scene for the week's discussions on NHI and universal healthcare, the BHF invited Judge Albie Sachs as one of the authors of our constitution, to provide the opening address.

He was followed by keynote speaker, the University of Johannesburg's Professor Mcebisi Ndletyana who reminded delegates: "We all stand to lose if we allow inequalities to exist".

"The establishment has left many people in the cold, and they will listen to the people who give them hope. They will support those – including populist demagogues – who offer them a stake in the system."

Delegates at the conference were treated to a history lesson with a purpose as Professor Ndletyana explained that all the major democratisation movements have been underpinned by business interests.

"Business needs a stable, democratic state in order to prosper, and the state gets its sustenance from the taxes of business: it is a symbiotic relationship," he said.

For Judge Albie Sachs, the rights promised in our constitution – including the right to equitable medical treatment – will not need to be forced on the health industry or business, because he believes that they want to see universal healthcare.

He related his recent excellent service at a Cape Town hospital where he was treated for a tumour on his colon.

"The treatment I received was marvellous," he said, "but I had a sense of great sadness because I knew there were people not far away from my hospital bed who were not even getting minimal treatment.

"The gap between excellent medicine and the medicine for the majority is getting bigger. We can't carry on like this."

This sentiment was echoed in a video produced by BHF which highlighted the fact that medical care is not equitable. Medical aids are confusing to ordinary members.

"It is a reminder of who we are servicing and why we are here," said Grace Khoza, Executive Director at AfroCentric Health who was the facilitator for the evening.

"This meeting of the BHF is happening because we are determined to find a roadmap to universal healthcare," she said.

"We are here because we want transparency, communication and partnership. We are actively seeking ways to partner with government."

Judge Albie Sachs called for a participatory process to ensure that NHI is not just a pipe dream.

"All of our people will be able to enjoy the right to health that our constitution guarantees, and the BHF is an important part of that process," Khoza said.

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