

PRESS RELEASE**The Executive Director of UNAIDS commends the President of South Africa for his bold leadership on HIV**

The government's commitment to ending the AIDS epidemic in South Africa has saved millions of lives

PRETORIA/GENEVA, 2 December 2015—The Executive Director of UNAIDS, Michel Sidibé, has commended the President of South Africa, Jacob Zuma, for his bold and visionary leadership in responding to HIV. During a meeting in Pretoria, Mr Sidibé and President Zuma discussed the country's plans to end the AIDS epidemic in South Africa and how UNAIDS can support South Africa to advance its Fast-Track efforts to reach ambitious targets by 2020 and drive the epidemic into permanent decline.

"I appreciate the support that UNAIDS has given South Africa since Mr Sidibé first visited for World AIDS Day in 2009," said President Zuma. "I remember we were together then, and he also came the following year, when we both tested for HIV in public. People said I was crazy, but I knew it had to be done to show people that they didn't have to be afraid. He was with us then and he will be with us every step of the way to ending AIDS."

During Mr Sidibé's 2009 visit, President Zuma, who was newly elected as President earlier that year, made major policy announcements that sparked a new era in South Africa's response to HIV.

"South Africa has completely changed the face of the epidemic," said Mr Sidibé. "These changes are a result of President Zuma's bold leadership, taking South Africa out of a dark period of despair, dependency and denial to a time of hope, ownership and full responsibility."

South Africa now has the largest HIV treatment programme in the world, with more than 3 million people accessing treatment across the country. South Africa currently tests 10 million people annually for HIV and around 600 000 people newly started antiretroviral therapy in 2014 alone. These programmes have been supported by an unprecedented domestic investment in HIV—currently \$1.8 billion a year— and the second largest in the world.

In 2014 President Zuma, Former President Bill Clinton, UNAIDS and other partners brokered a radical reduction in the cost of viral load testing, thereby making it possible for many more people to be tested and the effectiveness of their treatment to be monitored.

One of the biggest successes in South Africa's response has been in stopping new HIV infections among children. In 2004, approximately 70 000 babies became newly infected with HIV; by 2014, that number had been reduced by almost 90%.

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The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) leads and inspires the world to achieve its shared vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. UNAIDS unites the efforts of 11 UN organizations—UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, UN Women, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank—and works closely with global and national partners to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals. Learn more at [unaids.org](https://www.unaids.org) and connect with us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.