

## **UNAIDS Executive Director welcomes South Africa’s National AIDS Plan, highlights importance of agreeing and implementing priorities**

**Johannesburg 7 June 2007** – Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), Dr. Peter Piot, today welcomed South Africa’s new National Strategic Plan for AIDS and expressed optimism that the country is well on the way to leading Africa into a new phase in the AIDS response.

He congratulated South Africa on establishing the world’s largest antiretroviral treatment programme, and on having put together an ambitious and credible five-year plan.

“But making the plan is just beginning,” he noted. “The real work starts now.”

Dr Piot stressed the importance of rapidly agreeing and implementing priorities, and ensuring that action occurred not just at national but at district and local level too.

He highlighted the critical need to scale up prevention efforts: “For every person who embarks on antiretroviral therapy in South Africa, another five become infected with HIV. This poses real challenges for a sustainable AIDS response.”

He added: “In a country where HIV prevalence exceeds 15%, everyone needs to be aware of their risk of infection, and be in a position to take individual responsibility to protect themselves and their partners.”

This, he said, will require focusing on social drivers of the epidemic, including economic inequalities, networks of multiple concurrent partnerships, male behaviours and attitudes and the unequal status of women.

He committed UNAIDS support to the National AIDS Council to implement the plan.

“Each of us must acknowledge and fulfill our role in ensuring that the plan achieves its goals” he said. “This is a collective responsibility: if we fail, we will all be held accountable.”

He added: “The end of the epidemic is no-where in sight. Our descendents will be living with HIV and its legacy long after we have gone but we can influence what they inherit by what we do now by ensuring that what we put in place can be sustained over the longer term. We must put every AIDS programme to the test: Does it work now, will it still work, ten, twenty, thirty years from now?”

Dr Piot, who is currently undertaking an official visit to South Africa, met with Deputy President Phumzile Mhlambo-Ngcuka, the Minister of Health and the Acting Minister of Health. He also held discussions with the Secretary General of the ANC, scientists, the Nelson Mandela Foundation, representatives of civil society, activists, and business leaders, and participated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> South African AIDS Conference.

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