

## Press release

### **UNAIDS praises First Lady of Ethiopia for her leadership role on women and AIDS**

**Addis Ababa, 25 June 2007** – UNAIDS commends the First Lady of Ethiopia, Mrs Azeb Mesfin, for her commitment to the AIDS response and her leadership on the issue of women and girls.

The Ethiopia National Coalition for Women against AIDS was established by prominent Ethiopian women in June 2003, under the leadership of the First Lady in response to the growing impact of AIDS on women in the country. Since then, Mrs Mesfin – who is also Chair of Social Affairs Standing Committee of the Parliament—has been instrumental in galvanizing support for social mobilization activities involving women and increasing awareness and visibility for the contribution of women in the national response to AIDS.

“I am impressed and deeply appreciative of the commitment and the personal leadership of Mrs Mesfin on AIDS issues,” said UNAIDS Deputy Executive Director Michel Sidibe at a meeting with the First Lady to explore ways for strengthening the ongoing collaboration between UNAIDS and the Coalition. “She has translated on the ground the vision of the UNAIDS-led Global Coalition on Women and AIDS which was established in 2004 to respond to the increasing feminization of the AIDS epidemic,” he added.

Women in Ethiopia are estimated to account for over 50% of people living with HIV. Imbalance of sexual negotiation power between men and women, lack or inadequate knowledge about AIDS and insufficient access to sexual and reproductive health and educational services make women and girls particularly vulnerable to HIV infection in the country. Women and girls are often the first to suffer the social and economic consequences of the AIDS epidemic, as well as carrying the responsibility of caring for people living with and affected by HIV.

“To win the fight against AIDS effectively, we have to understand the reality of women’s lives and put women on the frontlines of the AIDS response,” said the First Lady Azeb Mesfin. “If the women of Ethiopia are not involved in facing the challenge of AIDS today, then we can not win. But if they play their full part, then we cannot fail.”

The First Lady expressed her appreciation for UNAIDS support to the National Coalition and reaffirmed her commitment to continue to work closely with community leaders to ensure the rights of women respond effectively to AIDS. UNAIDS and the Coalition will strengthen their partnership in various areas including documenting and disseminating the Coalition’s best practices.

In addition to her work on AIDS among the women in her country, First Lady Azeb Mesfin is also an active member of the Organization of African First Ladies Against HIV and AIDS (OAFLA).

#### **Contact**

For further information, please contact Abdoul Dieng, Regional Adviser, African Organizations, UNAIDS Ethiopia, Tel: +251 11 544 3550, Mob: +251 91 150 2229, Fax: +251 11 551 1021

*UNAIDS is an innovative joint venture of the United Nations, bringing together the efforts and resources of the UNAIDS Secretariat and ten UN system organizations to respond to AIDS. The Secretariat headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland with staff on the ground in more than 80 countries. Coherent action on AIDS by the UN system is coordinated in countries through the UN theme groups, and the joint*

*programmes on AIDS. Cosponsors include UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank. Visit the UNAIDS Web site at [www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org)*