

Press release

More information needed on the impact of AIDS on children, says UNAIDS

Cairo, 30 October 2007 – At the Second Pan-African Forum on Children in Cairo, UNAIDS called for more work to be done in gathering strategic information on children and AIDS. The call came in efforts to increase the understanding of the AIDS epidemic in children and the impact it is having on their lives.

“One of our biggest challenges in the AIDS response for children is the failure to access the key data on children necessary for designing effective programmes. We urgently need to know more about how AIDS affects different children at different stages of childhood so that we can respond better to their needs,” said UNAIDS Deputy Executive Director for Programmes, Michel Sidibe.

Present at the forum were some 250 experts on children’s issues from 53 African countries who had gathered to discuss ways of improving data collection, measurement and monitoring of the AIDS epidemic in children, their families and the communities they live in.

Despite the increases in commitment, awareness and funding over the past five years there is still very little known about the AIDS epidemic in children and there is a marked lack of services specifically designed for children living with HIV.

The main aim of the forum is to assess progress made in implementing the ‘Plan of Action of Africa Fit for Children, an African Common Position’ adopted by the First Pan African Forum on Children six years ago. Participants will also deliberate the Call for Accelerated Action for Child Survival, Protection, Development and Participation, which will constitute Africa's Common Position and contribution to the UN Special Assembly on Children to be held in December this year.

In preparation for this Common position, UNAIDS Deputy Executive Director urged the experts to work on priority areas that could help advance the AIDS response for children. In addition to strengthening data collection-scaling up access to prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV these include; scaling-up access to antiretroviral treatment for children; investing in research and development of formulations of antiretroviral treatment that is more suitable for children; providing social welfare to children living with and affected by HIV and to their families and communities; ensuring children and young people have access to information about HIV including services available and HIV prevention.

In preparation for the meeting, the African Union Commission sent out a questionnaire, based on the priorities, including HIV, identified in the Africa Fit for Children Plan of Action. Out of the 25 countries that responded, the results showed that there is still much work to be done.

"It became clear from the responses that although some progress has been made in some areas by some countries, not much has been done to address the children's problems. The targets set out in the Africa Fit for Children have not been fully achieved and there has not been considerable improvement in the children's lives in Africa", said Adv. Bience Gawanas, AU Commissioner for Social Affairs.

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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 in the AIDS response. 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 UN theme groups, and joint programmes on AIDS. UNAIDS' Cosponsors include UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank. Visit the UNAIDS Web site at www.unaids.org