



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
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pour l'éducation,  
la science et la culture

Organización  
de las Naciones Unidas  
para la Educación,  
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة  
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联合国教育、  
科学及文化组织

**Message from Mr Koïchiro Matsuura,  
Director-General of UNESCO  
on the occasion  
of World AIDS Day 2006**

**1 December 2006**

This year marks 25 years since the world first heard the acronym 'AIDS'. Since 1981, we have witnessed major achievements in the response to the epidemic - from individuals and local communities up to the global level. Many different constituencies have come together to address a common challenge. There have been important scientific breakthroughs (in particular, the development of antiretroviral treatment), unprecedented levels of resource mobilization, and progress in coordinating and improving the effectiveness of the response.

Despite this progress, however, approximately 40 million people are living with HIV today, an estimated 8,500 new infections occur daily and only one in ten people have access to treatment and prevention services, including prevention of mother-to-child transmission and access to antiretroviral therapy. Young women and girls are disproportionately vulnerable to HIV due to gender inequalities and traditional gender roles; young people between the ages of 15 and 24 comprise 50 percent of new infections; and populations key to the dynamics of the epidemic continue to be woefully underserved by national responses, including sex workers, men who have sex with men and injecting drug users.

There can be no room for complacency when it comes to HIV and AIDS. Strong action is required, particularly through massively expanded and intensified prevention efforts alongside activities to expand access to treatment, care and support. Otherwise, the epidemic will continue to spread and threaten hard-won development gains and future prospects for sustainable development. Intensified, more strategic and coordinated responses are necessary if the world is to prevent

the further spread of HIV and protect individuals, families, communities and nations from the impact of AIDS.

This year, World AIDS Day is dedicated to the theme of 'accountability'. It is a theme that embraces responsibility for one's personal conduct, solidarity between individuals and groups in different countries, and pledges made by major global organizations and national governments. In many cases, accountability boils down to whether commitments are being honoured and promises being kept. In this regard, there are encouraging indications that the world is willing to address the ongoing challenge posed by the epidemic. Governments worldwide committed themselves to accelerating their responses to the epidemic at the 2001 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS (UNGASS), a commitment that was reaffirmed at the United Nations World Summit in 2005 and again at this year's High-Level Meeting on AIDS. In the years following UNGASS, there has been strengthened action at all levels, with increased leadership and commitment, more resources and intensified delivery of HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. Some countries have also reported achievements in national human rights frameworks and have involved civil society in the development, implementation and evaluation of national responses.

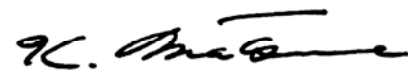
For its part, UNESCO undertakes its work in the context of a broader effort organised through UNAIDS to move towards Universal Access to prevention, care, treatment and support. The priority that UNESCO has given to education is based on evidence that education contributes towards the knowledge and personal skills essential for the prevention of HIV, and protects individuals, families, communities and nations from the impact of AIDS. Education helps to overcome the conditions that facilitate the spread of HIV, including poverty, ill-health, violence and abuse, particularly against girls and women. Beyond this, education can create the conditions of understanding and tolerance that contribute to reduced stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV.

In 2004, UNESCO raised its level of engagement by establishing its leading role in EDUCAIDS, the Global Initiative on Education and HIV & AIDS, supporting comprehensive education sector responses. Thirty countries are currently engaged in EDUCAIDS and more are expressing interest. In addition, all of UNESCO's sectors, institutes and field offices contribute to the Organization's work on HIV and AIDS, which is attracting greater recognition and support.

To reflect the priorities of Universal Access and UNESCO's role within the UNAIDS programme, earlier this year I initiated a revision and updating of the UNESCO strategy on HIV and AIDS. This is being conducted through an extensive consultative process throughout UNESCO and, when completed at the end of this year, will provide the framework for guiding our actions in the years ahead. The overarching goal of the strategy remains to ensure that Member States have the most effective response to HIV and AIDS in all sectors relevant to UNESCO's mandate. The priority is to prevent the spread of HIV through education and to protect the core functions of the education system from the worst effects of the epidemic, drawing on the strengths and resources of all UNESCO sectors.

In addition to UNESCO's work at the programmatic level, we have made significant strides in making the UNESCO workplace a safer and more protective environment. A newly updated UNESCO workplace policy on HIV and AIDS calls for continuously raising awareness among UNESCO personnel through training sessions devoted to the subject. UNESCO is an active partner in the joint 'UN Cares' programme of the United Nations which aims to provide education, care and support for UN employees throughout the world. In addition, preventive commodity vending machines will be installed at UNESCO headquarters before the end of the year to facilitate access to these life-saving items.

In these and other ways, UNESCO is addressing the challenges presented by the HIV and AIDS epidemic. I urge everyone to use the occasion of this year's World AIDS Day to renew our collective commitment by holding ourselves accountable for the success of UNESCO's response to HIV and AIDS.



Koïchiro Matsuura