

Press release

World renowned musician and humanitarian Mstislav Rostropovich accepts appointment as UNAIDS Special Representative

Geneva, 28 April 2006 – Maestro Mstislav Rostropovich, the outstanding musician, strong defender of human rights and advocate for children’s health, has accepted the appointment as a Special Representative for the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). As UNAIDS Special Representative, Maestro Rostropovich will raise awareness and provide high level advocacy on HIV prevention, treatment, care and support among children and youth. Through his outstanding network in politics, humanitarian affairs and culture, Maestro Rostropovich will support the UNAIDS mission in the areas of the reintegration of institutionalized children and youth into society.

“I am proud to appoint Maestro Mstislav Rostropovich as UNAIDS Special Representative,” said Dr Peter Piot, UNAIDS Executive Director. “Through his music, his Foundation and his personal strong commitment to improving the lives of children and youth—I know that he will be a compelling and eloquent advocate in focusing attention on HIV and making a difference in the AIDS response. I am also confident that the prestige, talent and presence that the Maestro will bring to these issues will help the United Nations send a powerful message that will reach the hearts and minds of people throughout the world.”

Maestro Rostropovich and his wife, the soprano Galina Vishnevskaya, have since 1991 through their non-profit foundation actively been involved in the improvement of children’s health care in Russia and other Newly Independent States, formerly part of the Soviet Union. The Foundation also supports the screening of pregnant women for HIV and care for HIV-infected children.

“HIV poses a serious health risk to everyone - particularly to children”, the Maestro said.. “Every day children die, because they do not have access to prevention, treatment, care and support that could have saved their lives - This is not only a health issue, it is an issue of fundamental equity and human rights. In my capacity as a UNAIDS Special Representative, I will help save children’s lives by making the world leaders and international communities commit responsibility to meet the AIDS response”.

According to UNAIDS, the global AIDS epidemic is one of the worst crises affecting the world today. It is likely to have the most severe impact on children and young people. Globally, around one quarter of the nearly 40 million people living with HIV are under 25 years of age. Young people, between the ages 15 to 24, make up about half of new HIV infections worldwide. Each day there are nearly 1,800 new HIV infections in children under 15, mostly from mother-to-child transmission. Every minute a child dies of an AIDS-related illness and every minute a child becomes infected with HIV.

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