

Press release

Caribbean Regional Launch of UNAIDS Global Report 2008

In the Caribbean successes have been achieved but the situation remains precarious

Port of Spain, 29 July 2008 – According to latest data released by UNAIDS in its *2008 Report on the global AIDS epidemic*, the situation in the Caribbean regarding HIV remains precarious, despite a range of successes and gains.

A number of **Caribbean** countries have experienced an apparent stabilisation in the epidemic and several, such as Haiti and the Dominican Republic, have reported declines in urban areas. However, by the **end of 2007** an estimated **20 000** [16 000 – 25 000] people were **newly infected** and **14 000** [11 000 – 16 000] **died of AIDS-related illness**. An estimated **230 000 people are now living with the virus** in the region.

The Caribbean has had considerable treatment success, which has been dramatically expanded. By the end of 2007 30,000 people were receiving antiretroviral therapy, as compared to 20,000 at the end of the previous year.

In terms of prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) and blood safety great strides have been made in a range of countries. There has also been a strengthening of political support to the AIDS response both at home and abroad.

Myriad challenges remain. Prevention success has not kept pace with treatment success. This is especially the case among the most vulnerable populations such as sex workers, men who have sex with men and crack cocaine users.

The issue of sustainability of funding of the AIDS response is also key. It is recognised that there is a need to scale up financing, both from country resources and international support, to ensure that any gains made are reinforced and built upon. This is part of a long-term, visionary response necessary if the epidemic is to be successfully challenged.

“We have made some headway against HIV in the region” said Dr Michel de Groulard, Acting Director of UNAIDS Caribbean Regional Support Team. “But we still have a long way to go to ensure that our response is as effective as it should be and that our prevention strategies really work and reach those who need them most”.

- An estimated 33.0 million [30.3 – 36.1 million] living with HIV **worldwide**
- 2.7 million [2.2 million to 3.2 million] newly infected in 2007- nearly **7,500** new infections a day
- 2.0 million [1.8 million – 2.3 million] died of AIDS in 2007

In the **global** context new HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths are declining. There have been significant gains in preventing new HIV infections in a number of heavily affected countries where changes in sexual behaviour have occurred.

Condom use is increasing among young people with multiple partners in many countries. Another encouraging sign is that many young people are waiting longer to have sexual intercourse. This has

been seen in seven of the most affected countries: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Uganda and Zambia.

From 2005 to 2007 the percentage of HIV positive pregnant women receiving antiretroviral drugs to prevent mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) went up from 14% to 33%. In this same period the number of new infections among children fell from 410,000 to 370,000.

Treatment with antiretrovirals has saved lives. As reported earlier in 2008, some 3 million people are now receiving such treatment in low and middle-income countries. Partly due to the scaling up in the past two years AIDS-related deaths have declined from 2.2 million to 2 million in 2007 [ranges: 1.9 – 2.6 million to 1.8 – 2.3 million].

However, the epidemic is not over in any part of the world.

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