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AFRICA STILL FACING UNPRECEDENTED AIDS CRISIS

Increased coordination and scale up of HIV prevention and treatment programmes needed urgently to turn the tide on AIDS in Africa, says UNAIDS Executive Director at Africa's 14th International Conference on AIDS

Abuja, Nigeria, 4 December 2005 – “Urgent and sustained action is needed at all levels to increase access to HIV prevention and treatment services across Africa,” said Dr. Peter Piot, executive director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) at the opening of the 14th International Conference on AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections in Africa, in Abuja, Nigeria.

“Africa is still facing an unprecedented AIDS crisis. The reality is that in sub Saharan Africa over three million people were newly infected with HIV in 2005 – that’s 64% of all new infections globally and more than in any previous year for the region. Young people are making up half of these new infections.”

“AIDS continues to outstrip Africa’s efforts to contain it and continues to pose an acute threat to future generations,” said Dr Piot.

Highlighting evidence of political and financial commitment to AIDS, as well as examples of HIV declines in some countries, Dr Piot underlined that some important progress has been made since the last international conference in Africa held in Nairobi in 2003. But he stressed that much more intensive work is needed to ensure all people in Africa receive the HIV prevention and treatment services they need.

“Our priority now must be to ensure that the money and resources available for AIDS reaches those who need it most and that HIV prevention and treatment programmes across the region are rapidly increased in terms of size and scale,” he said

Dr Piot addressed participants at the opening ceremony of the conference which will run from 4 to 9 December. The UNAIDS Executive Director highlighted the urgent need for greater coordination and commitment among governments, communities, donors and international organizations to turn principles into action on the ground.

For the first time in the history of the International AIDS Conference in Africa, the 2005 conference will commence with a two-day ‘Leadership Forum’— hosted by current Chairman of the African Union and President of Nigeria Olusegun Obasanjo— where leaders from all sectors will discuss the opportunities and challenges of scaling up an effective AIDS response in Africa, and develop strategies for progress.

“Africa is in an extraordinary new era in tackling the AIDS crisis – the era of large-scale implementation, the era of reaching towards universal access,” said Dr Piot. “The stakes have never been higher and leadership on AIDS is more important than ever.”

The International Conference on AIDS and STIs in Africa was founded in 1986 by a group of African scientists. The conference is held bi-annually in African countries and is Africa’s leading forum for discussion of developments and trends about the AIDS epidemic in the continent.

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