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MESSAGE TO XVI INTERNATIONAL AIDS CONFERENCE

“Time to Deliver”

Toronto, 13-18 August 2006

*Delivered by Dr. Peter Piot,
Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS*

On 2 June 2006, Governments injected new momentum into the fight against AIDS. At a High Level Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, they adopted a Political Declaration in which they committed themselves to a range of actions vital to our struggle. They pledged to tackle the causes and forces that propel this epidemic, most especially by promoting gender equality, the empowerment of women and the protection of girls. They also stressed the need to respect the full rights of people living with HIV. They called for strengthened protection for all vulnerable groups -- whether young people, sex workers, injecting drug users, or men who have sex with men. They called for provision of the full range of HIV prevention measures, including male and female condoms and sterile injection equipment. And they called for the full engagement of the private sector and civil society, including people living with HIV.

It is my hope that with the Declaration, world leaders have finally placed on record the personal commitment and leadership needed to win the fight against AIDS -- the greatest challenge of our generation, and of the next. Only if we meet this challenge can we succeed in our other efforts to build a humane, healthy and equitable world. Only if we win this fight can we reach the Millennium Development Goals, agreed by all the world's Governments as a blueprint for building a better world in the 21st century.

The task before us now is to sustain the momentum generated by the Declaration. We must hold leaders to their commitments. As the theme of this conference tells us: It's time to deliver.

It's time to deliver because this is a pivotal moment. After an unconscionably late start that cost tens of millions of lives and tore apart hundred of millions more, the world's response has finally gained real strength. In the past five years, we have rallied political leadership; mobilized financial and technical resources; brought lifesaving antiretroviral treatment to people the world over; and even reversed the spread of HIV in some of the world's poorest nations. We need to accelerate this progress.

It's time to deliver because our opportunities to respond effectively are far greater today than they have been at any time in these 25 years of AIDS. Therefore, our responsibility to act and redress our past failures is even greater. And those with the greatest power to effect change must shoulder the greatest share.

It's time to deliver because at the High Level Meeting, Governments committed themselves to being as close as possible to universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010.

It's time to deliver because ultimately, the only acceptable outcome is to put an end to AIDS. May this conference be a milestone in our journey to get there.

Kofi A. Annan