



**AIDS 2024**

# THE URGENCY OF NOW



**AIDS AT A CROSSROADS**





# OPENING REMARKS

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WINNIE BYANIMA

AIDS 2024 OPENING SESSION, MUNICH, GERMANY

MONDAY 22 JULY 2024

Your Excellency Chancellor Scholz of the Federal Republic of Germany,

Excellencies, Ministers,

Colleagues and friends of the AIDS movement.

Good evening.

Thank you Germany, thank you city of Munich for hosting us in this beautiful city. We got the visas. We are here.

## My friends, your determination has brought the world this far.

77% of people living with HIV around the world are on antiretroviral treatment, compared to 47% nine years ago. A 30 percentage point increase. That's huge.

They said it could not be done, but with solidarity, you did it.

We did it. So well done.

But just as we can see the finish line, some leaders are beginning to walk backwards. They're having doubts.

So today on behalf of all of us in this hall, I make three urgent calls to world leaders. By leaders I mean political leaders and business leaders:

## First, ensure that the work to end AIDS is fully resourced.

Aid to support the HIV response in developing countries has been critical.

It got us here. It must continue. Don't cut it. Increase it, sustain it. Fund the frontline heroes gathered here today and all the HIV activists out there in the communities. Fund them.

And then, free developing countries from the stranglehold of debt. Free them. In Angola, in Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zambia, debt servicing is more than 50% of all the government revenue that is collected. Sierra Leone spends 15 times more on public debt servicing than on the health of its people. Think about that. The choking debts must be restructured and restructured now so that governments can pay for the health of their people.

## Second, get the long-acting medicines to all low- and middle-income countries.

Gilead, I'm calling you, I know you're in the room. Gilead you have a long acting injectable called lenacapavir. I call it a miracle preventive tool. You have a miracle tool. This could transform access for gay men, for trans people, like my brother Jay who was here, for sex workers, for young women in Africa, who could be freed from stigma and fear of being attacked for being seen just swallowing tablets.

But right now Gilead, lenacapavir is priced for people in rich countries—this inequity never served us well in the HIV response. It didn't! Some smart people have done the calculations. They're showing us that generic manufacturers could make this miracle prevention tool not for over 40 thousand dollars that its priced in America but for less than 100 dollars per year in the developing countries.

So Gilead, make this happen, now. Not in four, not in five, not in six years' time.

Don't limit this miracle product to a few producers. The price will remain high and millions will be excluded, but grant generic licensing through the UN backed Medicines Patent Pool, and make generics available to all of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Because we know that 38% of people living with HIV are in upper-middle-income countries. The country may be labelled as a middle-income country, but the people who need this preventive tool are poor people who live in rich countries.

So, let lenacapavir reach the women I met in the favelas in Brazil, a middle-income country, let lenacapavir reach the gay men I met in Jamaica, a middle income country, let the civilians fleeing the war in Ukraine get lenacapavir. Let it happen, now!



### Third, world leaders, lead! Stand for justice.

When governments, such as my own Uganda, announce that they will hunt down LGBTQ+ people as criminals simply for who they are and who they love, it is no surprise that those people will not walk up to a clinic to get lifesaving treatment. Punitive approaches are driving LGBTQ+ people, sex workers, people who use drugs, and other marginalised communities away from services. This is an injustice. Leaders, political leaders, scrap these hateful harmful laws, now.

And end the discrimination faced by girls and women that is driving the AIDS pandemic especially in Africa. 3 out of 4 newly infected young people (ages 15–24) are girls, one is a boy. There is an injustice there. We must deal with the vulnerability of girls and young women.

Governments, do what's right. Roll out secondary education. Let the girls be in a safe place of school. Give them sex education to free them, to give them knowledge.

### Dear friends, the evidence is very clear. The path that ends AIDS is well sign-posted, it is proven and it has been promised by the governments of the world.

We cannot turn away from solidarity when, of the 40 million people living with HIV around the world today, almost a quarter do not have access to life-saving treatment. We cannot turn away when every minute, somewhere in the world, a person dies of AIDS-related causes.

Success or failure will be determined by the actions of leaders, both political and business leaders, today. Let us continue walking the path of solidarity, together and with urgency. We have no time to wait.

Thank you very much.





