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by

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Thank you Mr. Enrico Granara and Mr. Giorgio Guglielmino for that introduction, and thank you for organizing this meeting.

The Government of Italy has already made significant contributions in the global response to AIDS and is moving fast to expand its role in tackling the epidemic, and I am grateful for your support for UNAIDS. In fact, the Global Fund is a child of the G8 meeting that took place in Genoa.

Civil society is the foundation of an effective response to the global AIDS epidemic. No amount of money can replace the commitment of communities in this effort.

The state of the epidemic

AIDS is the most globalised epidemic in the history of humankind. Sub-Saharan Africa is at the epicenter of the global epidemic, accounting for over 70% of the world's 40 million HIV infections. In four countries of southern Africa, HIV prevalence is over 30% (Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe). The immediate cause of southern Africa's food crisis last year was drought, but one underlying driver was the weakness of agricultural production as a result of AIDS.

The fastest growing epidemic is in Eastern Europe – particularly worrisome is Russia. The Caribbean is still experiencing high levels of infection.

There is potential for the epidemic to explode in China, India and Indonesia. Even in Western Africa, where infection rates were relatively low, there is now a sharp increase in infections, such as in Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Nigeria.

We are still at the early stages of the epidemic. In China and India, we are seeing an epidemic only just gathering momentum.

AIDS is having an enormous impact on societies. Consider those left behind when adults die from AIDS: the millions of orphans – they will account for 15% of all children in the worst affected countries by 2010.

We are witnessing an increasing feminization of the epidemic. Every year brings an increase in the number and proportion of women infected with HIV. Globally, more than half of all persons infected between the ages of 15 and 49 are women. In Africa, the proportion is reaching 60%.

A time of great opportunity

There are clear signs the global response to AIDS is entering a new phase—a time of great opportunity and hope to defeat this epidemic. AIDS is undoubtedly a major problem—one of the pre-eminent challenges of our era—but it is a problem with a solution.

There is growing political momentum, momentum of evidence, and real momentum in greatly increased resources.

This progress also presents us with new challenges. One is launching large and sustained treatment and prevention programs. The time of pilot projects is over. Programs need to be brought to scale so they can reach millions of people. This transition will take time, but the work must proceed with urgency.

Perhaps the most acute challenge is that of institutional and human capacity. Greatly increased resources and political commitment are clearly not yet matched by an increase of institutional and human resources. In the countries most affected by the AIDS epidemic, AIDS itself is greatly worsening the human capacity crisis. We need to tackle the tough issues like limits imposed by international financial institutions on the number of health and social service workers in the public sector; the emigration of skilled health workers from south to north; and the need for fair salaries and conditions of service in countries.

A third challenge is harmonization. From a survey we did in 57 countries, we can see the quite shocking reality on the ground: tens of public and private donor AIDS missions per year per country, a plethora of monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and rival national coordination mechanisms often imposed from the outside. We are already seeing the real costs of such fragmentation, including ineffective use of resources, high transaction costs, reduced overall impact, and limited accountability.

Just three weeks ago, the international community took a crucial step towards a more effective response to AIDS. Representatives of international organizations and donor countries, including Italy, reached agreement on three core principles.

Referred to as the “Three Ones”, these principles call for:

- every country to have one agreed upon HIV/AIDS action framework that provides the basis for coordinating the work of all partners
- one national AIDS coordinating authority, with a broad based multi-sector mandate and with strong and genuine representation from NGOs and communities of people living with HIV/AIDS, and,
- one agreed country-level monitoring and evaluation system.

We are now working with donors and national governments to put these principles into action.

Fourth is accountability. In an era of increasing resources and political commitment, the Three Ones principles bring needed coordination and accountability. They are not intended to impose one solution on any country, but they do serve as guidelines that will increase collaboration among donors, streamline reporting requirements, maximize the impact of resources, and produce tangible results.

I know there has been discussion in Italy about the importance of measuring the impact of funding – that is also a major emphasis for us at UNAIDS and will be one of the key benefits of the principles that were recently agreed upon.

A final challenge is adequate resources. Fully funding the response to AIDS will require an extraordinary effort, which cannot be met from currently planned regular domestic and international development budgets. It will require extraordinary leadership and will have to use currently untapped resources. Clearly donors and affected countries need to review their own commitments.

UNAIDS and Civil Society

Civil society engagement is at the core of UNAIDS' work, but it's not up to me to tell you what your role is.

Let me tell you a bit on UNAIDS. We deliver five key functions: leadership and advocacy; strategic information to guide the efforts of partners; tracking, monitoring and evaluating the epidemic and the response; brokering partnerships; and, mobilization of financial, technical and political resources.

UNAIDS has been at the forefront of UN reform efforts. We have instituted a Unified Budget and Workplan process which identifies specific results to be achieved by our nine UN Cosponsors, the UNAIDS Secretariat and other UN partners, in support of the UN System Strategic Plan objectives to address AIDS.

UNAIDS has a presence in 70 countries, and we are in the process of significantly expanding our country staffing. A strong Global Fund requires a strong UNAIDS. We make the money work.

UNAIDS also promotes civil society involvement in planning and delivery on the country level. We all know that institutions must do a much better job of responding to civil society. Last week, UNAIDS staff from around the world met in Geneva, and a young woman from South Africa stood up and said to all of us, "I keep hearing that community members should speak out more. People do speak where I come from – they just aren't listened to."

AIDS is a problem of the globalized world, it is dividing people but it's also unifying the world. I have seen that AIDS can be a promoter of democracy, and of the involvement of civil society.

One example is in the Ukraine, where there is no tradition of civil society involvement in decision making, and where today groups of people living with HIV are actually sitting next to the President and participating in the dialogue about how to respond.

Conclusion

AIDS is the defining issue of our generation – not just because of the millions of lives it has claimed or the communities it has devastated. AIDS has challenged us to understand how inequity, poverty, and political failure have fed disease, and how all sectors of society must be part of the response to a truly exceptional public health threat. Working together, we have the opportunity to stop AIDS from defining the next generation.

I am very much looking forward to listening to the discussion today, and to working together even more closely in the future. At UNAIDS we enormously appreciate your work and your commitment.

We have all worked very hard to raise the resources, and we need to raise more. But a key challenge for all of us now is to make sure the money reaches people – and that it works for people.