



Speech

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

World AIDS Day Luncheon

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**Speech by
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14 years ago today, the global community sought to shine a bright light on the rising number of women with AIDS – by focusing the 3rd World AIDS Day on “Women and AIDS.” At that time, it was estimated that 2 million women worldwide were living with HIV.

Today, as we once again return to this theme – the number of women living with HIV has skyrocketed to 20 million – and the upward climb continues.

Impact on Women and Girls

Today, sixty percent of all those with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa are women – and over seventy-five percent of young people with HIV are girls. In one Kenyan city, the rate of HIV infection among young women is *seven times* great than the rate among young men.

In the Caribbean, right here on America’s doorstep, the number of new infections among women outstrips that among men. In Jamaica, teenage girls are 2.5 times more likely than boys their age to be infected.

The fastest growing rates of new HIV infections among women are now found in Eastern Europe and Asia. And, in America, the leading cause of death among African American women ages 25-34 is AIDS.

The disproportionate infection of millions of poor women isn’t just an injustice; it is a socioeconomic disaster.

In many nations, women are the **food producers**. Their deaths can lead to famine.

Women are **mothers**; when they die, their children lose the love, care and support they need.

Women are **caretakers** of the sick; when they die, the sick are often left to fend for themselves.

In short, women are the **backbone** of society. Keeping women healthy is not just the right thing to do; it’s the smart thing to do.

If there’s one place in this epidemic to intervene, one place where our efforts will yield dramatic results, this is it. The truth is empowering women and girls to protect themselves and their families from AIDS is key to turning the tide.

If women and girls had more options – the “right to abstain” and still go to school; to choose marriage, rather than have it forced on them; to decide when and with whom they have sex; to ask their husbands to be faithful; to negotiate condom use; to live their lives free from violence; to earn incomes adequate to feed their families – their

ability to protect themselves from HIV would be real. But, sadly, that is too often not the case.

Reducing women's vulnerability to HIV means increasing their access to information, services, and resources. It means promoting long-term solutions, not quick fixes. It means changing our approach to prevention.

Solutions for Women and Girls

The Global Coalition on Women and AIDS was recently launched by UNAIDS and a wide range of partners to advocate for strategies based on the realities of women's lives – something akin to ABC Plus.

These strategies include:

- Reducing violence
- Protecting property and inheritance rights
- Ensuring access to health care
- Investing in microbicides and female condoms
- Securing access to education and economic opportunity

Now, the UN, the US, and all of us in this room and in World AIDS Day commemorations around the world, must join forces to turn these opportunities into day-to-day realities for women and girls everywhere.

Reasons for Hope

This is a big challenge, but there are reasons to hope.

We have reasons to hope because – over the past three years, funding for the fight against AIDS in low income countries has nearly tripled, reaching \$6.1 billion in 2004.

We have reasons to hope because – with these greater resources and the tireless efforts of our indigenous partners on the ground, we are increasing access to voluntary counseling and testing, AIDS education in schools, programs to prevent mother-to-child transmission, antiretroviral therapy, support to orphans, and more.

And we have reasons to hope because – we now have a global agreement on new “rules of the road” or key principles for supporting country-driven action against AIDS – which we call the “Three Ones” – so that donors and host countries can work together to shape a more effective and coordinated response.

UNAIDS was pleased to spearhead this process – in partnership with the US and the UK, who were invaluable to its adoption and are central to its implementation. If we are going to make real progress – we must do it together.

Conclusion

These are all very positive signs. Yet much more must be done.

To continue to make serious progress, communities everywhere – local and global – must join forces to design prevention, care and treatment efforts that meet the needs of women and girls – while engaging men and boys as agents of change.

UNAIDS is pleased to be working with ICRW, MAC AIDS Fund, the UN Foundation, and many others on a ***U.S. Women and AIDS Tour***, which will bring together a group of inspiring women from the frontlines for a multi-city awareness raising tour. The Women Tour will be officially launched in New York City on March 2nd and culminate in Washington, D.C. on March 8th – International Women’s Day. The tour is designed to educate and empower – and mostly, to build common ground. We look forward to working with you and your organizations on this effort.

Clearly, the time for band-aid approaches is behind us. Together we must move from principles to practice; from calls to action, to greater action itself; and from ideas to implementation.

And perhaps most importantly, in every country, in every community, in every single effort to fight AIDS, we must make sure to ask: “Will this work for women and girls?” Because if we can get that answer right, we can win this fight.

Thank you.