



Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS

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Speech

**Statement at the General Assembly High-Level
Meeting on HIV/AIDS**

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by Dr Peter Piot

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Excellencies, distinguished delegates, colleagues and friends:

We have heard the Secretary-General emphasize in his speech the dramatic change in global action against AIDS since this August Assembly adopted the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS four years ago.

But, equally, as the Secretary-General and His Excellency Monsieur Jean Ping have said, we have not turned back the epidemic. In fact, given the quantum worsening in the epidemic in the past years, the gap between need and action remains enormously wide and may even grow.

Looking back over the past four years, two disquieting facts become evident. One is that AIDS is an unprecedented global crisis – there is simply no other example of this kind. The other is that until and unless we control this epidemic it will continue to expand and worsen – for decades – killing unbelievably large numbers and wrecking entire societies.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

These two facts require us to make a quantum leap in our commitment, in our goals and in our action on tackling this terrible epidemic. These two facts show that this epidemic will defeat us unless there is an exceptional response from the world's leaders and publics.

Our response will be equal to this challenge only when several milestones have been met.

The first and foremost milestone is that AIDS get the same level of attention and concern by the world's leaders as they give to global security – not an iota less. In every key policy-making body, the AIDS epidemic needs to be taken up as regularly and with as much scrutiny as the most urgent security threats and crises are.

The second essential milestone is that we must ensure universal access to both HIV prevention and HIV treatment. It has become obvious in the space of the past years that nothing less than universal access to effective HIV prevention and treatment will be sufficient if we are to keep this epidemic from engulfing the next generations.

And for universal access to become a reality we must immediately close the huge funding gap of many billions. Yes, there has been remarkable progress since 2001, notably because of the creation of the Global Fund called for in the Declaration of Commitment. But the shortfall is widening.

A third milestone is that we must make the money work for people on the ground. For the money to work effectively all actors and funders need to support nationally led strategies through the 'Three Ones' principles, which have been endorsed by governments, civil society and donors worldwide since 2004. And for the money to work the rights and needs of women and of the most vulnerable and marginalized people – particularly sex workers, men who have sex with men, and injecting drug users – must be accorded the highest priority in practice. And, equally, people living with HIV have to be accorded their rightful leadership role at every level.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

A fourth milestone towards a response that is truly equal to the threat is that we fully incorporate a long-term horizon into our planning and in our actions. We must move from the reactive to the active and strategic. This is an imperative because the AIDS

epidemic is a long-term one, it will not somehow disappear one fine day. Consequently, at the same time as we work on an emergency footing to make universal access to HIV prevention and treatment a reality, we have to achieve several other things too. We have to put in place the systems that are needed to realize longer-term solutions, such as an HIV vaccine and microbicide. We have to tackle the fundamental drivers of this epidemic, such as lack of education, gender inequality, poverty and discrimination. And we have to overcome the enduring obstacles to development created by the epidemic itself, such as the orphaning of generations of children and the stripping of human and institutional capacity. In other words, we need to plan for exceptional action on the things that will make a difference in one year and in five years – as well as in 10 years and 20 years. We must make this conceptual leap in our planning and actions.

Mr President, I can assure you of the commitment of the 10 UNAIDS Cosponsoring organizations and myself to working hard to reach these four milestones. We have come a long way since the creation of UNAIDS, the Joint and Cosponsored UN Programme on HIV/AIDS – but it is not enough. As a UN system we need to maximize our collective effectiveness by pooling our efforts in every country as a fully joint UN team and programme on AIDS. This is nothing less than UN reform in action for the benefit of the people.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The Declaration of Commitment adopted in 2001 was a brave and great leap forward – but it is self-evident today that success against this epidemic requires that almost every country execute a far stronger plan, far stronger action, and clear targets that go beyond 2015.

If we invest now on the right scale and in the right manner in tackling this epidemic, we could free up scarce resources desperately needed for development much sooner than we think. Resolve the AIDS crisis and we remove a major hurdle to achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

My respectful call to you is that when this Assembly meets a year from now that it will not be to discuss what has not been done on AIDS, but to agree on action to address the material and dare I say political obstacles in the path of universal access to HIV prevention and treatment. We cannot afford to rest before this is achieved.

Thank you.