

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**MESSAGE ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD AIDS DAY**

**1 December 2003**

Two years ago, the world's nations agreed that defeating HIV/AIDS would require commitment, resources and action. At the General Assembly's Special Session on HIV/AIDS in 2001, they adopted the Declaration of Commitment, a set of specific, time-bound targets for fighting the epidemic.

Today, we have the commitment. Our resources are increasing. But the action is still far short of what is needed.

Significant new funding to fight the epidemic has been pledged, both by individual Governments and through the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. The vast majority of countries have in place broad national strategies to combat HIV/AIDS. A growing number of corporations are adopting policies on HIV/AIDS in the workplace. Increasingly, community and faith-based groups -- which have often taken the lead in the fight against AIDS -- are working as full partners with Governments and others in mounting a coordinated response.

But at the same time, the epidemic continues its lethal march around the world, with few signs of slowing down. In the course of the past year, every minute of every day, some 10 people were infected. In the hardest-hit regions, life expectancy is plummeting. HIV/AIDS is spreading at an alarming rate among women, who now account for half of those infected worldwide. And the epidemic is expanding most rapidly in regions which had previously been largely spared -- especially in Eastern Europe and across all of Asia, from the Urals to the Pacific Ocean.

We have failed to reach several of the Declaration's targets set for this year. Even more important, we are not on track to begin reducing the scale and impact of the epidemic by the target year of 2005. By then, we should have cut by a quarter the number of young people infected with HIV in the worst affected countries; we should have halved the rate at which infants become infected; and we should have comprehensive care programmes in place everywhere. At the current rate, we will not achieve any of those targets by 2005.

Clearly, we must work even harder to match our commitment with the necessary resources and action. We cannot claim that competing challenges are more important, or more urgent. We must keep AIDS at the top of our political and practical agenda.

That is why we must continue to speak up openly about AIDS. No progress will be achieved by being timid, refusing to face unpleasant facts, or prejudging our fellow

human beings -- still less by stigmatizing people living with HIV/AIDS. Let no one imagine that we can protect ourselves by building barriers between "us" and "them". In the ruthless world of AIDS, there is no us and them. And in that world, silence is death.

On this World AIDS Day, I urge you to join me in speaking up loud and clear about HIV/AIDS. Join me in tearing down the walls of silence, stigma and discrimination that surround the epidemic. Join me, because the fight against HIV/AIDS begins with you.