



**STEP UP THE PACE
OF HIV PREVENTION
IN AFRICA**



AFRICA LAUNCHES BOLD, RENEWED EFFORT TO STEP UP PACE OF HIV PREVENTION

Addis Ababa/Brazzaville/Nairobi/Ouagadougou, 12 April 2006: As the world grapples with ways to mitigate the daunting impact of AIDS on Africa's development, a call emerged loud and clear from African political leaders in major African cities today for 2006 to be a "Year for Accelerating HIV Prevention in the African Region". Innovative approaches, creative thinking and more holistic actions are needed across Africa, from all involved, if prevention is to succeed.

Flagging off the initiative Tuesday 11 April in Addis Ababa, Ethiopian Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, noted that the commitment to declare 2006 a year for acceleration of HIV prevention in Africa has a "special meaning for the people of the continent". Many African countries, he observed, have been implementing prevention interventions, which have been reasonably successful. "But the progress has not been commensurate with the challenges we face. This is why we need to scale up our prevention measures," he said.

AU Commission Chairperson, Prof. Alpha Konare, under whose leadership the HIV prevention acceleration was launched in partnership with UN agencies said, "We have heard time again that prevention is better than cure, but our problem is turning policies into actions to reach everyone, everywhere with services on a sustained basis to achieve meaningful HIV prevention in Africa." In the long run, he said, behaviour change is much cheaper than allowing people to become infected. This launch is timely in view of the Special Summit of AU Heads of State and Government on HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria due to be held in Abuja, Nigeria, May 2-4, and UN General Assembly Session on AIDS in New York at the beginning of June, Professor Konare added.

Rwandan First Lady and President of the Organization of First Ladies in Africa, Mrs Jeannette Kagame, who spoke on the role of women in HIV prevention, said "women, have proved to be leaders in the struggle to rid our world of AIDS, but have also paid the highest price...". She noted that "thousands of women worldwide have been working tirelessly, and often anonymously, as care givers to affected families and community members, but the face of the epidemic in Africa is still distinctly female."

She also called for a more results-oriented HIV prevention approach, including door to door education campaigns across the continent.

According to the World Health Organisation and UNAIDS, putting in place comprehensive and interlinked HIV prevention activities has the potential to avert 63% of the new infections expected to occur by 2010,

Without effective prevention activities, as part of the overall strategy of universal access, the already severe toll of AIDS will continue to rise.

- Since the 1980s, 50 million Africans have been infected by HIV; 22 million have died

- Parental deaths have led to the orphaning of more than 12 million children
- “Sickness and death resulting from HIV/AIDS is undermining agricultural productivity and economic growth, and reversing progress in areas such as life expectancy and infant mortality
- Despite all efforts to combat HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa, 3.2 million new HIV infections occurred in 2005
- HIV infections are rising most rapidly among young people (15-24) and women.

WHO Regional Director for Africa Dr. Luis Sambo, agreed that prevention, care and treatment are interdependent parts of a comprehensive approach and that accelerating prevention involves addressing root causes of HIV transmission; strengthening health care systems; expanding the reach of HIV testing and prevention of mother-to-child transmission, and developing more effective strategies for reaching women and youth with information on how to protect themselves against HIV infection.

UNAIDS Director for Country and Regional Support, Mr. Michel Sidibe, recommended that AIDS responses must be exceptional, but not isolated, requiring balancing of political momentum on AIDS and putting countries in the lead. He also stressed the need for an appropriate balance between emergency action and long term commitment.

In his remarks, the Executive Secretary of the ECA, Abdoulie Janneh, said “We must improve the quality of information on HIV prevention and make it available to all, especially our vulnerable groups.” He added that as countries in the region scale up efforts to prevent HIV this year, they should make the courageous move to align their budgets to their national AIDS plans and balance allocation between prevention and treatment; and care and support.

Other speakers included representatives AIDS WATCH AFRICA, Youth Networks and People Living with HIV and AIDS.

UN Agencies were commended for proving the required technical support for the launch of the initiative. The support provided includes assistance to countries to revise scale up plans, mobilization of additional resources to support the scaling up of HIV prevention and advocacy for acceleration of HIV prevention.

An information kit was distributed at the launch representing a first step toward engaging and informing the media on the urgent need to accelerate HIV prevention. The kit reveals that accelerated prevention demands strong national leadership, scaling-up successful interventions, strengthening health systems, and applying a comprehensive approach that addresses social, cultural and economic factors fuelling the epidemic (along with strictly medical interventions).

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