

Press release

Africa leaders announce new resolve to combat AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria

Abuja, 4 May 2006 – A special summit of the African Union ended in Abuja with the adoption of far-reaching decisions to stem the tide of AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria – three diseases which kill an estimated four million Africans every year.

The summit adopted the Abuja call for accelerated action towards universal access to AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria services in Africa by 2010. The delegates also adopted an African Common Position, to be presented at the 2006 High level Meeting on AIDS in New York (31 May – 2 June) by African Union Chairman and Congolese leader, President Denis Sassou Nguesso.

In the Abuja call, African leaders called for intensified leadership at all levels, further commitments regarding human rights, increased mobilization of resources, including negotiations for debt cancellation, and collective advocacy with multilateral and bilateral donors.

Other key features of the Abuja call are the strengthening of health systems; scaling up HIV prevention, treatment, care and support; improved access to affordable medicines and technologies; promoting partnerships with civil society and the private sector.

Regarding health financing, the African leaders renewed their commitment to give greater urgency to a previously agreed target of allocating 15% of their national budgets to health and incorporating health financing plans into national development plans and frameworks.

“We need nothing less than a continent-wide social movement fighting this crisis,” said Dr Peter Piot, UNAIDS Executive Director, during the opening ceremony. “This political and public commitment needs to be for the long term so that universal access to comprehensive AIDS programmes is sustained in the years ahead. This is our best hope of bringing the epidemic to a halt and to reverse the unimaginable destruction it has caused,” he said.

Speaking at the opening of the Abuja Summit, Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo commended African countries for the progress they have made in fighting AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. The Nigerian leader called for more transparent utilization of funds at the local level.

In his remarks, President Sassou Nguesso alluded to the estimated 2.9 million AIDS-related deaths in Africa every year saying that Africa must stop being “a reservoir of people living with HIV”.

Also speaking on the occasion, African Union Commission Chairperson, Prof. Alpha Konare, outlined a number of measures Africa should take to successfully deliver AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria services. These include the local production of essential medicines, partnerships at all levels, greater mobilization of resources, and strengthening programmes that reach vulnerable groups.

Sub-Saharan Africa has just over 10% of the world's population, but is home to more than 60% of all people living with HIV - 25.8 million. In 2005, an estimated 3.2 million people in the region became newly infected, while 2.4 million adults and children died of AIDS.

For his own part, WHO Regional Director for Africa, Dr Luis Sambo, gave a panoramic view of the successes recorded and challenges faced in tackling the three diseases in the region. “The progress made since the last summit shows that it is possible to bring these diseases under control provided adequate resources are made available to scale up cost-effective interventions towards universal access”, he told the summit.

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