

A message from Dr María Isabel Rodríguez, Minister of Health of El Salvador

A warm hello to all the board members taking part in this, the 29th meeting of the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board. Before I go on, I would like to apologise for not being able to be there with you all at this important meeting, especially in this time of global financial crisis, where our decisions will have huge repercussions on the strategic response we have to give to the HIV pandemic.

I would also like to thank you all for your messages and well-wishes, I am truly grateful for those and sorry I cannot be there.

I would like to congratulate our Executive Director and the NGO representatives for their substantive and valuable reports. Both of these documents will help guide us along the road to our goal of GETTING TO ZERO.

It has been 30 years since the epidemic started. There are now more than 34 million people living with HIV, with 2.7 million new infections each year, and 1.8 million deaths in 2010. But we should continue with renewed hope, as there has been a drop in the number of new infections, global progress in access to antiretroviral therapy, a decrease in the number of deaths due to TB/HIV co-infection, and new scientific evidence has been found that will give us the weapons we need to put a stop to this epidemic.

But more than anything else, we should be extremely satisfied with the renewed political commitment unanimously agreed upon by Heads of State and Government at the recent high level meeting in New York. With new targets and 10 essential new commitments to work towards eradicating HIV, we are very close to ensuring that no more children are born with the infection and that their mothers do not die from the disease. With the Treatment 2.0 strategy, we will be able to improve the quality of life of people living with HIV, but also prevent new infections.

We must step up our efforts to prevent the spread of HIV amongst young people, and we can really do this if we focus on their education and on giving them the opportunity to develop their talents.

We have had a particularly successful year in terms of regional and global support in the fight against HIV/AIDS. We took part in the Regional Consultation and High Level Meeting on Universal Access to HIV Prevention, Treatment, Care and Support in Mexico on the 1st and 2nd of March. We also had the opportunity to share our message at the 64th World Health Assembly in May, and we were able to discuss all the regional proposals drawn up throughout the year at the 28th Meeting of the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board which took place between the 21st and 23rd of June.

I would like to say how happy I am with the global efforts to prevent stigma and discrimination, and to ensure that our most basic human rights are valued as they should be.

I would like to congratulate the new members of the Coordinating Board Committee, Poland as Chair, India as Vice-Chair and the United States as Rapporteur, and the NGOs: the African Sex Worker Alliance in South Africa, the International Treatment Preparedness Coalition in Thailand, and Brazilian NGO Gestos for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Before I finish, I would like to thank you all for your unwavering commitment to setting the world free from HIV.

I wish you all the best for a new year full of happiness and well-being.

Thank you.

Also available on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-8jz0VqrYk>