

LEADERSHIP STATEMENT¹
People living with HIV/AIDS
XV International AIDS Conference, Bangkok Thailand, 11-16 July 2004

1. POLICY ISSUES

We are concerned that 20 years after the onset of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, only few countries have documented policies on how to deal with HIV/AIDS. Political statements are not enough; they need to be accompanied by strategic vision to which countries and the world can make leaders accountable. Many countries have strategies which treat HIV/AIDS as a short term problem without fully institutionalizing it in all sectors including the judiciary. Some of the very few leaders who have stood at the head of the response have not done the right thing. In many countries in Asia, there is a war against drug users instead of dealing with drug use. This is not a conducive environment for producing results around HIV/AIDS prevention.

Only a few countries have effective legislation to support a response which is within a human rights framework. Different forms of discrimination can only be effectively dealt with when there are enforceable laws to back up campaigns for a change in attitudes and values.

We call upon countries to strengthen coordination and alliance building around the AIDS response at all levels so that the many voices will be delivering the same voice.

We also call upon political leaders to base their efforts in taking leadership on scientifically proven strategies so as to avoid confusion around prevention and treatment.

2. SCALING UP

We recognize the tremendous efforts in a number of countries to raise the profile of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. We are concerned that the implementation of treatment programs is painfully slow, and is leading to many preventable deaths in many countries. We urge all countries of the world to move into an emergency mode and to institutionalize known effective strategies like comprehensive prevention, care and treatment in health care settings, and impact mitigation in other sectors including agricultures, the judiciary, defense, industry and private and public sector workplaces.

We urge all donor entities, UN organizations, public sector entities especially the ministries of health and non-public entities, to resist competition for limelight and instead concentrate on raising the number of people treated in every country.

¹ Convened by GNP+, Global Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS

There is an urgent need to work in new partnerships between public and non-public sector, recognizing each other's comparative advantage in policy formulation and service delivery in the least developed and middle income countries.

The world needs to move away from pilot programs which are not expandable to implementing country-wide interventions using sound scientific evidence that already exists.

Developed countries should help to stem the tide of health care workers and other professionals from developing countries. They should provide money, through the different financing mechanisms, so as to remunerate scientists and other professionals to be able to enable people to live securely in their own countries.

3. FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES

We urge all stakeholders in the HIV/AIDS response, especially those with financial capacity, to tap the potential in communities including ordinary citizens who may not have specialized training. They are central actors in delivering prevention and care services.

We call upon all countries, including donor nations, to set targets for reducing stigma and discrimination so that people living with HIV/AIDS, who are afraid, are able to come out and put their face to the response.

We invite all stakeholders to motivate the involvement of new people in responding to a growing epidemic which badly needs additional hands.

We invite the donors, foundations and private sector multinationals; to explore different ways of working in partnership where partner's roles are clearly spelt out and there is mutual respect for the different roles and comparative advantages of partners.

Governments both in developed and developing countries should respect their past commitments and increase spending on overseas development and health care.

All countries should make new financial commitments to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS TB and Malaria which is a critical tool for accessing money for all countries with funding gaps for their responses, and to UNAIDS and WHO to be able to support countries in strengthening their human base to respond to the epidemic

We call upon financial institutions including the World Bank and IMF to quickly implement the debt-for-AIDS programs so as to free additional resources for poor countries to invest in health care and other social services.

We call upon donor entities to stop attaching heavy conditions, which do not respect country realities, on resources to deal with the HIV/AIDS and other health issues.

4. MOBILIZING PEERS AND GREATER LEADERSHIP AT ALL LEVELS

We, as PLHA leaders, commit to the following:

- i. Standing together and empowering each other in order to deal with stigma and discrimination in many communities.
- ii. Balance responsibility and rights so as to deal with the increasing burden of care
- iii. Act as watch dogs for their own commitments and commitments of other stakeholders
- iv. Creating space for others, including governments and government departments, NGOs, the private sectors to do what they know how to do best.
- v. Deal with conflict and difference in opinion in an empowering way that creates continuous dialogue rather than blocking action
- vi. Acquiring new skills and information to make them more effective participants in the response.
- vii. Be respectful in their advocacy actions so as to attract more support.
- viii. Building coalitions with other movements including women movements, labor and trade organizations, gender, environment and debt networks in order to take on HIV/AIDS as a mass mobilization cause.

5. ACCOUNTABILITY

The world needs to revisit the vision created at the UNGASS and renew individual stakeholder commitments to this vision.

UNAIDS and its co-sponsors should continue to strengthen its monitoring efforts over the UNGASS commitments at the country and inter-country levels.

Countries should publicize the achievements and shortcomings of the response so as to create space for on-going follow up and renewal of commitments and taking appropriate actions.

We call upon countries to deal with corruption at levels which hinder resources from being most effectively used. Industrialized nations that provide supplies for responding to HIV/AIDS have a hand in ensuring that their award processes are free from non-transparent commissions.