

SPEECH

By: Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS

Date: 26 August 2011

Place: Busan, Republic of South Korea.

Occasion: 10th International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific

Please check against delivery

Sustaining a Wave of Progress

I want to begin by thanking the Republic of South Korea for hosting this important event. And I want to express my gratitude to the organizers for your hard work to make this meeting a success, and to the city of Busan for your generous hospitality.

Today, South Korea is demonstrating its full commitment to the global AIDS movement. For a country with almost no HIV epidemic, to be so deeply engaged in this regional event sets a powerful example of leadership and global solidarity. You are showing other countries how to step up and share responsibility for ending global AIDS.

I also want to thank South Korea for your continuous work towards eliminating HIV-related travel restrictions. We look forward to hearing more good news about these efforts.

Today I also recognize the leadership of His Excellency, Epeli Nailatikau, the President of Fiji. Mr. President, the United Nations salutes the bold and clear decision of your government earlier this week to lift all HIV-related travel restrictions. Your presence at this conference shows clearly that in the AIDS response, nothing can substitute for strong leadership.

UNAIDS' vision: Zero discrimination. Zero new HIV infections. Zero AIDS-related deaths.

Also present today are more than 2,000 committed leaders and activists who devote their time and passion to this movement every day. Your numbers and enthusiasm are testament that AIDS is not a tragedy. It is an opportunity to transform society for the better.

AIDS gives the world a chance to be inclusive. To restore the dignity of people who suffer because of who they are and who they love. To give voice to the voiceless. To confront stigma, discrimination and prejudice.

A wave averted

Let us remember, eight years ago, strategists were predicting a devastating “second wave” of the HIV pandemic would sweep across Asia.

By 2010, they said, India would have the highest number of infections in the world. Fifteen million would be infected in China. HIV would spread rapidly through the general population and millions would die.

But there was no wave.

Instead of escalating, HIV infection rates have dropped 20% across Asia and the Pacific in the past 10 years. Bleak prophecies were swept away by waves of progress and reform breaking across the region.

How did this happen? With political will and community commitment.

Last month, visiting Chengdu in China, I saw innovative programmes reaching urban men who have sex with men and new efforts to provide rehabilitation instead of jail to people who use drugs. Indonesia is also recognizing the value of pragmatism over punishment for drug users. And organizations like the Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers are helping sex workers find their voices and engage with government leaders on reform.

Asian and Pacific countries are sharing responsibility for the global AIDS response. This summer, India vowed to reject any efforts to include “data exclusivity” clauses in bilateral

trade agreements, enabling them to keep making the generic drugs that millions of people in low- and middle-income countries rely on.

We are seeing more countries moving away from external dependence and towards country-owned and country-led HIV responses. In 2009, China, Malaysia, Pakistan, Samoa and Thailand funded the bulk of their own AIDS responses from domestic resources. Here in the Republic of South Korea, the government is providing direct funding to NGOs and civil society for HIV prevention, treatment, care and support.

The danger remains

But this is not the time for complacency.

Eight years ago, those strategists pointed out the risk factors that would produce a new wave of infections. These issues are still with us. Escalating migration. The marginalization of sex work. Injection drug use. A growing youth population.

And meanwhile, the Asia-Pacific epidemic is still evolving. Many countries who introduced a strong AIDS response at first missed opportunities to put widespread prevention in place, and now face severe outbreaks. The Philippines and parts of Vietnam, Indonesia, China and India are still unprotected, with the potential to generate large numbers of infections.

Many challenges remain, and they threaten to derail the progress you have made.

First, the region has only about one-third of the funding needed to achieve universal access. Many countries in the region still depend heavily on foreign aid, particularly for treatment. And that money is drying up. AIDS funding disbursements from donor governments for low- and middle-income countries fell a full 10% between 2009 and 2010, and is certainly still dropping.

Second, the available money isn't being allocated in a smart, cost-effective way. Only 20% of existing resources go towards high-impact prevention in the region. The other 80% is averting less than 5% of new infections. This is not value for money.

Third, across the region, new infections are highly concentrated among vulnerable populations—men who have sex with men, transgendered people, sex workers and people who inject drugs—but the community organizations that serve these groups receive only a tiny fraction of AIDS resources. The funding architecture does not support fund flow to these organizations, where resources can have a tremendous, sustainable impact.

Finally, the quality and scale of HIV programming is inadequate. As the Secretary-General has pointed out, more than 60% of people who need treatment in the region aren't receiving it.

The Political Declaration, forged at the High Level Meeting in July, sets a goal of putting 15 million on treatment globally by 2015. Filling the gap in Asia and the Pacific—getting 100% treatment coverage—will go a very long way towards reaching that target, and will inspire the rest of the world to reach as high.

As a region that is home to many emerging economies, what will it cost you if you do not meet these challenges—and soon? The Political Declaration gives Asia and the Pacific concrete goals. What you choose to do next will shape the end game for AIDS in the region and the world.

Four leadership fronts

So I urge you to boldly lead on four specific fronts.

One: Integrate. Studies show the AIDS response has the greatest impact where HIV prevention and treatment programmes have been integrated with other health and social welfare services. For example, offering voluntary counseling and testing for HIV in TB clinics, screening for HIV as part of prenatal care and leveraging the reach and resources of the AIDS response for detecting and treating non-communicable diseases like cervical cancer.

Two: Give affected populations more ownership. We know that the most effective strategies and programmes are designed and implemented for communities, by communities. Those with their lives at stake—led and empowered by civil society and championed by political

leaders—must be involved in the design and implementation of all strategies and programmes.

Three: Focus. There are as many different HIV epidemics as there are districts in each country in the region. Responses must be specifically targeted to the precise nature of the gaps and risks. This requires better, more innovative epidemiological research and understanding of context. More importantly, each decentralized unit must have its own AIDS plan and budget tailored to the local need.

Finally, Invest. The amount required is actually quite modest: According to estimates from the Commission on AIDS in Asia, middle-income countries in Asia and the Pacific need less than 0.5% of their gross national income to fund focused responses that will continue to reverse their epidemics. You can do this.

New wave of progress

Each country in Asia and the Pacific—from the tiniest to the largest—has a part to play. I call on the Republic of Korea especially.

I am so pleased as an African—as a Malian—that a country like yours, coming out of a period of hunger and war, has been able to build a society that is one of the most advanced in the world, economically and technologically. You have a special role to play in the fight against AIDS, bringing hope to the 34 million people living with HIV across the world and helping your neighbours in the region meet the goals of the Political Declaration.

You demonstrate that South Korea is not only an emerging power and a healthy country, but also one that is prepared to take up global leadership to change the world. You will accelerate the “new wave” of progress towards zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths.

It will not be easy, or comfortable.

At the High Level Meeting, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon expressed it well: “If we are to relegate AIDS to the history books, we must be bold. That means facing sensitive issues,

including men who have sex with men, drug users and the sex trade. I admit those were not subjects I was used to dealing with when I came to this job. But I have learned to say what needs to be said, because millions of lives are at stake.”

Thank you.

[END]

Contact

UNAIDS Geneva | Sophie Barton-Knott | tel. +41 22 791 1697 | bartonknotts@unaids.org

UNAIDS

UNAIDS, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, is an innovative United Nations partnership that leads and inspires the world in achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. Learn more at unaids.org.