

PRESS RELEASE

Champions come together to announce strengthened efforts for an AIDS-free generation in Africa

JOHANNESBURG, 13 April 2015—The **Champions for an AIDS-Free Generation** gathered together today to announce new efforts to ensure that all children in Africa are born free from HIV and that children living with HIV have access to life-saving treatment. Since young people continue to be deeply affected by the epidemic, the Champions also announced that they will add adolescents and HIV to their portfolio of work.

“The Champions are determined to keep HIV high on the continental agenda,” said Festus Mogae, Chairperson of the Champions. “We will leave no one behind and we will not rest until Africa has reached the goal of an AIDS-free generation.”

During their three-day meeting, the Champions are scheduled to hold high-level discussions with the President of South Africa, Jacob Zuma, the Deputy President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, and leading figures from the private sector.

The Champions for an AIDS-Free Generation was launched in 2008 by Mr Mogae, the former President of Botswana. The Champions transcend political partisanship to speak freely and independently about the issues that need solutions, both publically and behind the scenes. Since November, five new leaders have joined their distinguished ranks: Kgalema Motlanthe, former President of South Africa; Joyce Banda, former President of Malawi; Alpha Oumar Konaré, former President of Mali; Olusegun Obasanjo, former President of Nigeria; and Hifikepunye Pohamba, former President of Namibia.

“Today, we come together as a strengthened group of Champions to reaffirm our commitment to ending mother-to-child transmission of HIV and to ensuring that mothers and children already living with HIV stay healthy,” said Ms Banda. “I am proud to be involved in the **Champions for an AIDS-Free Generation**.”

As the Champions reaffirmed their commitment to an AIDS-free generation, they were joined by partners that include UNAIDS, the United States President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and private sector representatives.

“The Champions have been steadfast in calling for improved HIV prevention and treatment options, and there has been progress,” said UNAIDS Executive Director, Michel Sidibé. “Now, with their ranks strengthened, the Champions will be even stronger advocates to fast-track the AIDS response in Africa to ensure that every baby is born free from HIV and that their mothers stay healthy.”

“An AIDS-free generation is within our grasp if we use the scientific knowledge, data and tools at our disposal,” said Ambassador Deborah Birx, United States Global AIDS Coordinator and United States Special Representative for Global Health Diplomacy. “I am inspired today by this committed group of leaders, who are using their wisdom and influence to move towards an AIDS-free generation in Africa.”

“We need leaders like the Champions who are unafraid to speak out and put AIDS at the very top of Africa’s health agenda,” said Mark Dybul, Executive Director of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

Other partners of the Champions for an AIDS-Free Generation include UNICEF, the World Bank, the South African Development Community (SADC), the SADC Parliamentary Forum, the Economic Community of West African States and the South African Broadcasting Corporation.

The risk of a mother living with HIV passing the virus to her child can be reduced to 5% or less if she has access to antiretroviral medicines during pregnancy, delivery and breastfeeding.

“Women need strong partners like the Champions so they receive access to proper HIV counselling, treatment and prevention services,” said Lorraine Mashishi, a mother living with HIV. “Women living with HIV can avoid passing the virus on to their children if they get the support they need.”

Currently 21 of the 22 countries that are part of the *Global Plan to eliminate new HIV infections among children by 2015 and keeping their mothers alive* are in Africa. Since 2009, there has been a 43% decline in new HIV infections among children in these countries, but there were still 210 000 (180 000–250 000) new HIV infections among children in sub-Saharan Africa in 2013. Only 42% of children exposed to HIV were tested for the virus within the recommended two months. Without treatment, half of all children living with HIV will die by the age of two and the majority will die by the age of five.

Sub-Saharan Africa remains the region most affected by the AIDS epidemic—in 2013, there were 24.7 million (23.5 million—26.1 million) people living with HIV in the region.

The Champions are:

- **Festus Mogae**, former President of Botswana and Chairperson of the Champions.
- **Joyce Banda**, former President of Malawi.
- **Joaquim Chissano**, former President of Mozambique.
- **Kenneth Kaunda**, former President of Zambia.
- **Alpha Oumar Konaré**, former President of Mali.
- **Benjamin William Mkapa**, former President of the United Republic of Tanzania.
- **Kgalema Motlanthe**, former President of South Africa.
- **Olusegun Obasanjo**, former President of Nigeria.
- **Hifikepunye Pohamba**, former President of Namibia.
- **Desmond Tutu**, Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate.
- **Speciosa Wandira-Kazibwe**, former Vice-President of Uganda.
- **Edwin Cameron**, Justice of the Constitutional Court of South Africa.
- **Miriam Were**, former Chairperson of the Kenya National AIDS Control Council.

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Champions for an AIDS-Free Generation

The Champions for an AIDS-Free Generation is a distinguished group of former presidents and influential African leaders committed to an AIDS-free generation. Individually and collectively, the Champions rally and support regional leaders towards ending the AIDS epidemic as a public health threat. The Champions transcend political partisanship to speak freely and independently about the issues that need solutions, both publically and behind the scenes.

www.aidsfreechampions.org

UNAIDS

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) leads and inspires the world to achieve its shared vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. UNAIDS unites the efforts of 11 UN organizations—UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, UN Women, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank—and works closely with global and national partners towards ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030. Learn more at unaids.org and connect with us on Facebook and Twitter.