

PRESS RELEASE

On World AIDS Day 2015, Executive Director of UNAIDS calls on countries to quicken the pace of action

Fast-Track Strategy to reach people with HIV prevention and treatment and end the AIDS epidemic as a public health threat

DURBAN/GENEVA, 1 December 2015—On World AIDS Day 2015, the Executive Director of UNAIDS, Michel Sidibé, has said that countries are on a countdown to ending their AIDS epidemics and that if swift and effective action is taken over the next five years, one by one they will break their epidemics so that they cannot rebound.

Mr Sidibé made the remarks as he joined the Deputy President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, at South Africa's national World AIDS Day event, which was held in the Ugu District of KwaZulu-Natal Province on 1 December.

Introduced by Aaron Motsoaledi, the Minister of Health of South Africa, Mr Ramaphosa reflected on what World AIDS Day means to him: celebrating the courage of people living with HIV, evaluating the progress—or lack thereof—of the national AIDS response, recognizing partners and recommitting to the goal an HIV-free generation.

“This is the time for all of us to rise, act and protect. As a nation we must rise to the challenge and be confident that we can succeed,” said Mr Ramaphosa. “Yes, we will be triumphant and yes, we will make progress. As a nation and as individuals we must act to support and encourage others, and we must protect ourselves and those near to us.”

In his remarks, Mr Ramaphosa thanked Mr Sidibé for his role in encouraging South Africa to lead the charge towards ending AIDS.

“South Africa's story is one of moving from denial to acceptance, from dependency to ownership and from despair to hope, with impressive results,” said Mr Sidibé. “South Africa has shown us not to be afraid of our future, but to shape it.”

Political leadership, community engagement and global solidarity have changed the face of the epidemic in South Africa.

In 2009, only a few hundred thousand people had access to antiretroviral therapy in South Africa. In just six years the number more than tripled, and in 2014 more than 3 million South Africans were accessing the life-changing treatment.

This was made possible by the government's commitment and investment in the national response to HIV. South Africa invests US\$ 1.8 billion dollars in the AIDS response—the second largest domestic investment in the world and the biggest in Africa. South Africa also secured a 53% reduction in the price of the provision of antiretroviral medicines. This has allowed more people to have access to treatment and has saved the country almost US\$ 685 million over a two-year period.

The World AIDS Day event included participation by community champions, people living with HIV and a range of civil society organizations. A candle lighting ceremony was held to remember and honour loved ones lost to the AIDS epidemic.

“The world is facing a fragile five-year window of opportunity to break the epidemic and keep it from rebounding,” said Mr Sidibé. “We will not win against AIDS without communities. They are essential partners for the future success of the AIDS response.”

By supporting community organizations and strengthening local services, countries will be able to reach people who are still being left behind in the response to HIV. Ensuring access to HIV services for key populations will lead to healthier and more resilient societies. It will also significantly advance efforts to prevent new HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths, and to eliminate HIV-related stigma and discrimination.

UNAIDS estimates that a record 15.8 million people are now accessing treatment globally. However, 21.1 million people still do not have access to treatment and 17 million people do not know they are living with HIV. With attention to location and population, countries will be able to redistribute resources to improve access to HIV prevention, testing and treatment services and close the gaps towards ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030.

In 2014/2015 an estimated:

15.8 million people were accessing antiretroviral therapy (June 2015)

36.9 million [34.3 million–41.4 million] people globally were living with HIV (end 2014)

2 million [1.9 million–2.2 million] people became newly infected with HIV (end 2014)

1.2 million [980 000–1.6 million] people died from AIDS-related illnesses (end 2014)

[END]

Contact

UNAIDS Geneva | Sophie Barton-Knott | tel. +41 22 791 1697 | bartonknotts@unaids.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 to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals. Learn more at unaids.org and connect with us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.