

UNAIDS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SPEECH

WINNIE BYANYIMA

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The Political Declaration reflects
Africa's priorities and gives us a powerful platform
to rally the world behind the actions
needed to end AIDS by 2030
and strengthen preparedness for future pandemics.

At its heart is a simple but powerful idea:

Epidemics thrive on inequality.
We end epidemics by closing inequalities.

Thank you.

Your Excellency John Dramani Mahama, President of Ghana.

Your Excellency President Évariste Ndayishimiye, Chairperson of the African Union.

Your Excellency President Samia Suluhu Hassan of Tanzania.

Your Excellency Romuald Wadagni of Benin.

Your Excellency Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, Chairperson of the African Union Commission.

Excellencies, Heads of State and Government, Ministers, Distinguished Delegates,

It is a great honour to address this historic Summit on behalf of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, who sends his warm greetings and his deep appreciation to the African Union for convening this important meeting.

The Secretary-General has always believed that no global challenge can be solved without African leadership.

Today's Summit is further proof that Africa isn't simply responding to the global health agenda. Africa is helping to shape it.

Before I begin, let me pay tribute to the governments, frontline health workers, scientists, community leaders and volunteers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda who are courageously responding to Ebola.

I also acknowledge the leadership and support of the African Union, Africa CDC, the World Health Organization, the United Nations system and all partners supporting the response.

Their courage reminds us of an important lesson.

The Global Council on Inequality, AIDS and Pandemics, which I convene, found that pandemics and inequality reinforce one another in a vicious cycle. Inequalities allow outbreaks to become pandemics. Pandemics, in turn, deepen inequalities within and between countries.

Breaking that cycle is one of the defining challenges of our time.

Just a few weeks ago, Africa demonstrated how to do exactly that.

Through your Common African Position, you helped shape the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS adopted at the United Nations. Africa spoke with one voice, and the world listened.

I congratulate you.

We end epidemics by closing inequalities.

The Declaration reflects Africa's priorities and gives us a powerful platform to rally the world behind the actions needed to end AIDS by 2030 and strengthen preparedness for future pandemics.

At its heart is a simple but powerful idea:

Epidemics thrive on inequality. We end epidemics by closing inequalities.

The Political Declaration commits us to closing three of the most important inequalities that continue to drive the AIDS pandemic.

First, we must close the inequality in sustainable financing.

No country can end AIDS while constrained by shrinking fiscal space, unsustainable debt and declining external assistance.

Closing this inequality means giving countries the fiscal space to invest in resilient health systems, strong community responses and their own people. It means stronger domestic investment, supported by international solidarity and a fairer global financial architecture.

Sustainable financing is not charity. It is an investment in health security, development and resilience.

Second, we must close the inequality in access to innovation.

Scientific breakthroughs save lives only when they reach the people who need them most.

Innovation without access is not innovation, it is discrimination.

Africa knows too well the cost of waiting—for ARVs, for COVID vaccines, and now for the newest long-acting HIV prevention technologies in Europe and America.

Closing this inequality means ensuring equitable access to innovation, expanding technology transfer and local production, and enabling Africa not only to use new health technologies, but to produce and improve them.

We have the talent, we have the institutions, we have the market. Health sovereignty means not just being consumers, but producers and innovators.

Third and lastly, we must close the inequality in the enjoyment of human rights and gender equality.

AIDS follows inequality.

When girls are denied education, when women lack equal opportunities and control over their own bodies, when communities face stigma and discrimination, and where laws exclude rather than protect, the virus persists.

Closing this inequality means ensuring that every person can access prevention, treatment and care without fear, discrimination or exclusion.

Human rights are not separate from the AIDS response. They are among its most powerful determinants of success.

Excellencies,

Africa helped write this Political Declaration that the world signed on to.

Now let us use it to rally the world around one common purpose: closing the inequalities that drive ill health.

Closing inequality in sustainable financing.

Closing inequality in access to innovation.

Closing inequality in the enjoyment of human rights and gender equality.

If we close these inequalities, we will not only end AIDS as a public health threat. We will build stronger, fairer and more resilient systems for health, better prepared for the next pandemic.

Epidemics thrive on inequality. We end epidemics by closing inequalities.

The United Nations is proud to stand with the African Union on that journey.

Thank you.

