

Speech

**Special Summit of the African Union on HIV/AIDS,
Tuberculosis and Malaria**

Special Assembly of Heads of State and Government

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Excellencies

Dear Friends

The UN Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan regrets very much that he cannot be with us today and he asked me to represent him and I will begin with the message that he has sent for this occasion:

“Five years ago, when we met here in Abuja for the 2001 Africa Summit on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Other Infectious Diseases, I said then that this was a moment of hope; because I was convinced the Summit was a turning point in our response to the biggest development challenge of our time.

Five years on, my conviction has been borne out. We have seen a turning point in commitment. In more than 20 African countries, the response to AIDS is now being led personally by Heads of State or Government, or their deputies. Six African countries have reached the Abuja 2001 target of allocating 15 per cent of their national budgets to health and AIDS, or are close to it. The 2001 Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly gave us the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, and Africa’s partners have provided real support for the war chest that I called for in Abuja five years ago - the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

We have also seen a turning point in developments on the ground. A steadily growing number of African countries are seeing a sharp fall in new HIV infections. And in the past two years, there has been an eight-fold increase in the number of Africans benefiting from antiretroviral therapy.

But let us not imagine that the AIDS epidemic is waning by itself, or that the exceptional gravity of its impact has diminished. AIDS remains Africa’s greatest development challenge, and without defeating it, we cannot reach the Millennium Development Goals. That means we must guard against the danger of reducing, even by one iota, the priority we place on fighting AIDS in Africa, and worldwide. That is the central message of the report I have submitted to UN Member States on worldwide implementation of the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS.

Excellencies,

The roadmap for the next few years is clear. It is spelt out in the UNAIDS Assessment “Towards Universal Access” for HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. The Assessment reflects broad public debates in over 100 countries. Let me emphasize one overarching priority: if we are to win this war, our efforts will have to

be guided by the need to promote gender equality and all human rights for all - even those whose orientation, behaviour or life choices we may personally not agree with.

We must also do more in the fight against tuberculosis, which has been declared an emergency by Africa's Ministers of Health and which is also the leading cause of death among people living with HIV. I call on leaders attending this Summit to commit to full implementation of the Stop TB Partnership's Global Plan to stop TB. The Plan provides a roadmap for reversing the disease, and for driving down mortality through the expansion of treatment and prevention programmes.

Malaria too must be part of the picture. International funding for malaria control in Africa has increased significantly, and some countries have made considerable progress. But the disease continues to kill more than a million Africans every year, and puts real constraints on economic growth. To reach our common goal of halving malaria mortality by 2010, we need to do more to strengthen health systems, expand access to therapies and broaden the use of insecticide-treated nets.

As you know from long and hard experience, leadership is the key as we move ahead. That is why the fight against AIDS remains my personal priority -- and I look to you to keep making it yours. I urge all of you to attend the High-Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS in four weeks time in New York at the General Assembly, and to participate as one powerful and united voice. Indeed, it is the engagement of Africa's leaders that has brought us to where we are today. Only with your continued and full commitment can we achieve the end of AIDS in Africa and see fully effective action against the scourge of the deadly disease."

Excellencies,

The Secretary-General has emphasized the tremendous progress that has been made against AIDS since the 2001 Africa Summit. Instead of despair, as in the years before the 2001 Summit, each of us today has a sense of determination that we will prevail against this crisis.

There is positive news coming out of Africa!

There is no doubt that the crisis of AIDS continues and is getting worse and any slackening of our efforts would jeopardize even the hard-won gains of each and every one of us in these past five years.

Excellencies,

In this decisive phase, the questions facing us are: How can we manage to accelerate the pace of progress? How can we tackle old obstacles and new challenges identified during the consultations on universal access and summed up so well in the Brazzaville Commitment of last month?

I see three major challenges: The first one is that much more important financial resources are required. The continent will need nine to ten billion dollars in 2007 to continue intensifying the fight against AIDS. But at the present rate, we would only

have half of that amount. The challenge of financial deficit is nothing but a deadly deficit.

As recommended by the Brazzaville Commitment, no credible national AIDS plan should be without funds. Not only is it absolutely fundamental for States to honour their commitment of Abuja 2001 to spend 15% of their annual budget on health and AIDS, but it is also important that rich countries provide funding that is increasing, precise and sustainable.

Secondly, the time that should be used for action and implementation is spent on workshops and meetings. It is our collective duty 'to make the money work for people', as I always repeat to my colleagues at UNAIDS. This will require better consistency of our actions based on the Three Ones principles through a better involvement of civil society and primarily people living with AIDS. Moreover, we should overcome obstacles to have wider access to treatment and diagnosis.

Finally, as I said yesterday, it is time to add to our crisis management a strategic and long term response. Our challenge is to establish a stronger link between the fight against AIDS and development as defined by the MDGs. It is about time too for us to invest more in these three areas to ensure the long-term response.

Now we have to massively intensify prevention of HIV while we are ensuring access to treatment. It is the only way so that our children and grandchildren can be part of a generation without AIDS.

We must overcome the human resources crisis, particularly but not only in the health sector. In many countries we talk about brain drain when it is rather brain haemorrhage!

Another aspect of this strategic response is to attack the roots of the epidemic; stigmatisation and discrimination, inequality between men and women and abject poverty.

Excellencies

The common thread linking these actions is leadership at the highest levels of politics and civil society. We need nothing less than a continent-wide social movement fighting this crisis. And this political and public commitment needs to be for the long term to bring the epidemic to a halt.

Thank you