

Message on the occasion of World AIDS Day “Universal Access and Human Rights”

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On this World AIDS Day we are filled with both hope and concern.

Hope because significant progress has been made towards universal access. New HIV infections have dropped. Fewer children are born with HIV. And more than 4 million people are on treatment.

Concern because 28 years into the epidemic the virus continues to make inroads into new populations; stigma and discrimination continue to undermine efforts to turn back the epidemic. The violation of human rights of people living with HIV, women and girls, men who have sex with men, injecting drug users and sex workers must end.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called on “all countries to live up to their commitments to enact or enforce legislation outlawing discrimination against people living with HIV and members of vulnerable groups”. On this World AIDS Day, let us work urgently to remove punitive laws and practices and put an end to discrimination against and criminalization of people affected by HIV.

On World AIDS Day let us also act on HIV prevention. For every two people put on treatment, five are newly infected. Too often prevention programmes are not reaching those most in need.

We can eliminate mother-to-child transmission of HIV. We can empower young people to protect themselves from HIV. We can stop violence against women and girls. We can protect drug users from becoming infected with HIV. And we can reduce sexual transmission of HIV.

Gains made today are fragile and must be sustained. The economic crisis should not be a reason for reducing investments in health. Economic adjustments must be made through a human rights lens that keeps the focus on those most vulnerable. This is the time to increase rather than decrease funding for AIDS.

AIDS provides a powerful mechanism for creating integrated health, human rights and development programmes. We must take AIDS out of isolation and create a broad social movement that will accelerate progress toward the Millennium Development Goals.

World AIDS Day provides an opportunity for all of us – individuals, communities and political leaders – to take action towards making universal access a reality.