

AMERICAN-AFRICAN PARTNERSHIPS ARE REWRITING THE FUTURE OF HIV

Delivered on behalf of Michel Sidibé, Executive
Director of UNAIDS
22 September 2011
New York City
African Renaissance conference

STATEMENT

By: Delivered on behalf of **Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS**

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American-African partnerships are rewriting the future of HIV

Dear friends, I am very honoured to be with you today. It is very appropriate that we are meeting at one of the world's leading research facilities devoted to the preservation of materials on Africa and the African Diaspora.

I thank President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal for chairing this meeting. We are honored to also have with us today President Alassane Ouattara of Côte d'Ivoire; Mr. Jean Ping, Chairperson of the African Union Commission; and the Reverend Jesse Jackson.

I am very pleased to see the many African-American leaders here today who were also in Dakar last December at the roundtable on the role of culture in the AIDS response during the World Festival of Black Arts and Cultures.

I congratulate all of you who are forging partnerships with your counterparts in Senegal. I look forward to more constructive agreements emerging across Africa.

Getting to zero

Your efforts can make a big difference in two key dimensions: forging closer ties between Africa and the Diaspora, and promoting sustainable human development—particularly progress towards reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.

For Africa especially, strengthening progress against AIDS is a key aspect of the MDGs. For we cannot end poverty or ensure food security while mothers and fathers are getting sick. We cannot improve education for children—especially girls—without sexual and reproductive health services that reduce HIV risk behaviours among youth.

Zero discrimination. Zero new HIV infections. Zero AIDS-related deaths.

We cannot protect the health of mothers and children unless all women have access to HIV prevention and treatment. And we cannot improve the lives of women unless we address gender violence, inequality and other factors that make them highly vulnerable to HIV.

And now we look to you—American leaders forging partnerships with Africa—to help us build momentum in the AIDS movement. As university presidents, elected officials and leaders in the arts, culture and civil society, we need you to play key roles in helping us reach UNAIDS' vision of the future: Zero new HIV infections. Zero discrimination Zero AIDS-related deaths.

Gains against AIDS

I am very pleased to report that, despite setbacks caused by a global economic crisis, Africa—and the rest of the world—is making remarkable progress in reversing the AIDS epidemic.

In the past decade, new HIV infections have declined by more than 25% worldwide, and 56 countries have seen their epidemics stabilize or reverse. Thirty-four of these countries are in sub-Saharan Africa.

An uncontrolled, deadly virus has been transformed—through advocacy, innovation and political will—into a chronic, treatable disease for many.

But these gains remain fragile. In 2009, 2.6 million people worldwide became newly infected with HIV, and 1.8 million people died from AIDS-related illnesses. More than 6.6 million people are now accessing life-saving drugs, but nearly 10 million people living with HIV are still waiting for treatment.

This is why I have called for a “new deal,” where governments, donors, civil society and other stakeholders come together in new and innovative ways, sharing responsibility and accountability for results. Your participation is vital.

A groundbreaking Political Declaration

We have a road map.

In June, at the UN General Assembly High Level Meeting on AIDS, Member States, for the first time, stepped away from vague pronouncements, and committed to time-bound, specific programmatic and financial targets by 2015.

In a Political Declaration adopted unanimously by all 193 Member States, every country agreed to push towards eliminating new HIV infections among children in the next five years.

They also pledged to increase the number of people on life-saving treatment to 15 million and to redouble efforts to achieve universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support by 2015.

And for the first time, Member States officially acknowledged the special circumstances and needs of people most affected by HIV: men who have sex with men, people who inject drugs and people who buy and sell sex.

Countries also pledged to eliminate gender inequality and gender-based abuse and violence, and to increase the capacity of women and adolescent girls to protect themselves from HIV infection. This is vital, because the proportion of women living with HIV has been increasing in sub-Saharan Africa. Women now constitute 60% of people living with HIV.

Senegal's example

In reaching the goals of the Political Declaration and the MDGs, I am proud to see the Republic of Senegal is setting the bar high for the rest of Africa.

Thanks to the leadership of President Wade, the spread of HIV in Senegal has stabilized, and the country has one of the lowest infection rates on the continent. In the past decade it has fallen by half—from 1.4% to 0.7%.

I am excited that the delegation of African-American mayors, educators and artists that traveled to Senegal in June to sign partnership agreements was also able to visit the Centre for HIV/AIDS in Dakar.

It is very promising that the delegation saw the possibility of supporting the laboratory at the Centre with equipment as part of the implementation of the partnership agreement. These are the types of innovative, integrative actions that will propel the world to zero.

Mobilizing culture and sport for AIDS prevention

I also want to emphasize the important role of culture and sport in AIDS awareness and prevention. Star actors, musicians, athletes and other celebrities are our key allies.

UNAIDS is promoting the "Give AIDS the Red Card" campaign at major sports events to help us reach out to millions of fans. At the soccer World Cup last year in South Africa, 28 team captains signed the "Give AIDS the Red Card" appeal.

We also had support from many of the captains at the Women's World Cup this year in Germany, and the national delegations to the All-Africa Games in Mozambique in August.

Culture and sport are universal languages that can reach people at all levels of society—especially young people. Although HIV infections among young people are falling, more than half of them lack comprehensive knowledge about AIDS and continue to be at risk.

American generosity

Finally I want to tell you about my trip to Washington, D.C. last week to meet with leaders there on the next steps of U.S. support for the global AIDS response, and strategies for reaching the “three zeros.”

I participated in the launch of a new bipartisan Congressional caucus to strengthen the United States' response to AIDS both at home and around the world, and to maintain its position as a global leader on AIDS.

The U.S. government, and the generosity of the American people, has made a profound and positive difference in rolling back the AIDS epidemic. The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) has partnerships in 30 countries worldwide and has committed nearly \$39 billion to HIV and TB programmes since its inception in 2003.

Now moving out of “emergency mode,” PEPFAR continues as a juggernaut of HIV investment. Last year, it supported life-saving HIV treatment for more than 3.2 million men, women and children worldwide.

We continue to count on the American spirit of open-hearted determination, and on the dedication of leaders like you, to help us reach the “three zeros” in your own communities as well as through the partnerships that you are building between Africa and the Diaspora.

Thank you.

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Contact

UNAIDS Geneva | Sophie Barton-Knott | tel. +41 22 791 1697 | bartonknotts@unaids.org

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UNAIDS, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, is an innovative United Nations partnership that leads and inspires the world in achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. Learn more at unaids.org.

