



**Speech**

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**Statement to the ASEAN-United Nations Summit**

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**by  
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Your Excellencies, Mr. Secretary-General, distinguished colleagues,

I am honoured to have this opportunity to brief you on the challenges that AIDS poses to the ASEAN countries.

The global AIDS epidemic is an exceptional crisis. It is not just another infectious disease epidemic or another health problem. It is one of the make-or-break issues of our times, no less than global climate change and mass extreme poverty. There is simply no precedent in modern history for such a massive, globalized and destructive epidemic. And we are still in the early phase of this epidemic – certainly in the ASEAN region.

Excellencies, AIDS is a grave threat to the ASEAN region, as it is elsewhere.

Today, there are already nearly 1.5 million people living with HIV in the ASEAN region – with nearly 2% of all adults infected in some countries. Each one of these infections could have been prevented.

Let us not be misled by the seemingly low HIV prevalence rates. Experience from within and outside the region has taught us over and over again that once HIV gets in a community, it will spread rapidly unless and until there is an effective response. And because too few people in the region have access to HIV prevention and treatment programmes, the epidemics are likely to continue accelerating, with devastating consequences, be it for families, societal cohesion, poverty reduction or the economy. It is of great concern to see that even the most vulnerable groups are not being reached with HIV prevention programmes.

Excellencies,

AIDS requires a response as exceptional as the threats it poses. It is one of the greatest leadership challenges of our time. The basis of an exceptional response to AIDS is bold and determined leadership from the highest levels of the state. When confronted with such leadership, AIDS becomes a problem with a solution. Several of your countries have taught the world this hopeful lesson.

In every country – rich, middle-income or poor – that has succeeded in curbing its epidemic or shows the promise of doing so, it takes the strong leadership of a President or Prime Minister, who looks at the numbers and evidence, recognizes the danger, makes the courageous decisions needed, and delivers the right kind of response on a nationwide scale. No partnership, no 'NGO', no business can replace this role.

Given your personal commitment and stewardship, it is fully possible for the ASEAN countries to curb their AIDS epidemics today.

Over 99% of ASEAN's people are still uninfected. And your dynamic region possesses the resources and the capacity needed.

There is no 'one size fits all' for the diverse countries of the ASEAN region. Nonetheless, there are some fundamentals of any effective effort against AIDS.

Let me mention just a few:

First, the effort must have your full backing and leadership.

Second, the response must be multisectoral – the challenges posed by AIDS epidemics exceed the capabilities of any single sector, public or private, health or non-health.

Third, both HIV prevention and HIV treatment need to be expanded, with the ultimate goal being to ensure universal access to both. We need an AIDS-free young generation and a full and better life for those infected by HIV.

Fourth, people living with HIV and the most vulnerable people must be empowered to be a central part of the response, while AIDS-related stigma and discrimination are confronted.

We in UNAIDS – the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS – are already working with you on the ASEAN Work Programme on AIDS adopted at your Summit in Brunei Darussalam. You have our full support to realize the Vientiane Action Programme's goal for intensifying action on AIDS. I know I speak for the executive heads of UNDP and WHO, whose organizations are among the 10 Cosponsors of UNAIDS. These joint efforts of the UN system globally and on the ground are nothing less than UN reform in action.

Excellencies,

AIDS is one of the greatest leadership challenges of our times. We look to you to personally lead your country's response as that is the sole guarantee of success against this epidemic and will set an example to the world.

Thank you very much.