

MESSAGE ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD AIDS DAY

1 December 2003

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This World AIDS Day, the evidence again shows a growing epidemic. In hard-hit regions, AIDS threatens the very fabric of society and life expectancy is plummeting. In those regions where HIV is still relatively new, especially Eastern Europe and much of Asia, the epidemic is expanding fastest of all.

Yet amidst the unfolding tragedy of the epidemic, the global response to AIDS is entering an extraordinary and historic new phase of opportunity. This is being driven by political will, evidence of what works, and increased donor and national resources to fight the epidemic, including initiatives like the Global Fund Against AIDS, TB and Malaria, the US Government's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief and the World Bank's Multi-country AIDS Programs.

People living with HIV are entitled to a future. There are six million people across the globe whose lives are in jeopardy because they cannot obtain life-saving medicines – medicines which can now be supplied for as little as fifty cents a day.

The United Nations is in the forefront of the global emergency response which aims to save these lives. UNAIDS, with our Cosponsor the World Health Organization in the lead, is spearheading the campaign to ensure that by 2005, at least three million people with HIV receive life-saving antiretroviral therapy. This target is our first step on the way to overcoming the treatment gap which today divides the rich and resource-poor worlds.

An inseparable part of our efforts must be renewed attention to preventing the spread of HIV. Today's prevention gap is almost as large as the treatment gap – globally, fewer than one in five people have access to any sort of HIV prevention programme.

But where nations and communities have grasped the nettle, progress has been made. Across the world there are more and more examples of resolute action which is halting AIDS in its tracks.

There are few moral causes more important in the world today than to build the momentum which transforms scattered examples of success into a massive global

movement to overcome AIDS. There is nowhere better to start than in our own communities, and by eliminating the stigma which is still so often directed towards people living with HIV, as highlighted in this year's World AIDS Campaign.

The peoples and nations of the world, acting in concert, have the power to turn back AIDS: to educate our children, protect our young people, end the shameful stigmatization of people living with HIV, and secure the future for all those infected with, and affected by, HIV.

We cannot delay.

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