

## PRESS RELEASE

### **First Ladies of the world unite to prevent new HIV infections among children**

*First Ladies join forces to call for integration of HIV and maternal, newborn and child health programmes at special event during United Nations High Level Meeting on AIDS*

**NEW YORK/GENEVA, 8 June 2011**—Thirty First Ladies from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean gathered at a special event in New York to mobilize support around achieving the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS' (UNAIDS) vision of Zero new HIV infections among children by 2015. The event was held on the opening day of the UN High Level Meeting on AIDS which is taking place in New York from 8-10 June.

Mrs Ban Soon-taek, wife of the United Nations Secretary-General; Mrs Azeb Mesfin, First Lady of Ethiopia and President of the Organization of African First Ladies Against HIV/AIDS; and Mr. Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS co-hosted the New York event.

Around 1,000 babies are infected with HIV each day, 90% of whom are in countries in sub-Saharan Africa. HIV is also the leading cause regarding mortality among women of reproductive age in developing countries. The First Ladies agreed to advocate for comprehensive and integrated access to maternal and child health services that include services to prevent HIV transmission among infants and which keep mothers and children healthy.

Gender inequality, gender violence, discrimination and inequitable laws prevent pregnant women from accessing HIV testing and counselling, prevention, treatment and support services. "Women and girls must be at the centre of the AIDS response," said Michel Sidibé. "When women protect themselves from HIV, they protect a whole new generation from HIV."

More than 2 million children worldwide are living with HIV, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa. In Western Europe only 1,400 children are living with HIV, highlighting the global injustice of unequal access to maternal and child health services and the urgent need to increase access to HIV services for pregnant women in low- and middle-income countries.

"If women around the world are not involved in facing the challenge of preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV, we cannot win. If we all play our part, we cannot fail." said Mrs Mesfin.

In recent years, a number of countries have made great strides in reducing the rate of new HIV infections among children and globally in 2009, new HIV infections among children dropped by 25%.

"The fact that, in still too many places, HIV positive women are denied the right to give birth to healthy babies is a global injustice that we can end by 2015," said Mrs Ban.

On return to their respective countries, the First Ladies agreed to advance ten action steps to ensure that children are born free from HIV and to promote lifesaving HIV services for

[UNAIDS' vision: Zero new HIV infections. Zero discrimination. Zero AIDS-related deaths.](#)

women and children. These include supporting efforts to; increase the number of centres providing free maternal, newborn and child health services, including treatment to prevent the transmission of HIV from mothers to children; strengthen sexual and reproductive health programs for adolescents living with HIV; ensure meaningful engagement of people living with HIV; and promote zero tolerance for stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV.

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### **Contact**

UNAIDS | Sophie Barton-Knott | tel. +41 79 514 6896 | [bartonknotts@unaids.org](mailto:bartonknotts@unaids.org)

### **UNAIDS**

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](http://unaids.org).