

Serge Dumont , UNAIDS Special Representative on World AIDS Day, 1 December 2006

With close to 20 million deaths since the early days of the epidemic, 40 million people living with HIV, 4.3 million new infections and 2.9 million deaths caused by AIDS in 2006, the world is facing the most severe health crisis in history.

While much progress has been achieved, so much more remains to do!

The issues are so complex that an effort from all sides is required: the private sector, celebrities, NGOs and government.

One of the key challenges to tackle is the fight against the stigma and prejudices associated with HIV-AIDS, which prevent us from effectively stopping the spread of the disease.

The media has a crucial role to play in several areas: it can help change attitudes and mindsets, make business leaders, in developing countries in particular, realize that AIDS is an issue which directly affects economic growth and business, and it can provide vital information, especially to young people around the world, to ensure that they know how not to get infected.

From this perspective, journalists and communications professionals can probably save as many, if not more lives, than doctors.

World AIDS day provides us with the opportunity to pause and think about the difference that committed individuals and corporations can make to address this major disaster which will continue to affect generations to come.