

## **World AIDS Day**

**Message of Thoraya Ahmed Obaid  
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Today on World AIDS Day, it is time to take stronger action to prevent new cases of HIV infection and meet the needs and protect the human rights of people living with HIV/AIDS. It is time to remember and pay respect to those who have died from AIDS-related illnesses. And it is time to applaud those who continue to speak out and take action to end the suffering, stigma and discrimination associated with AIDS.

This year's theme, "Stop AIDS, Keep the promise," calls on governments, organizations, communities and individuals to be held accountable for their commitments.

Over the past two decades, we have learned what works. We know that much of the answer lies in universal access to prevention, treatment, care and support. We know that prevention remains the first line of defense and must be expanded alongside treatment. We know that measures to eliminate discrimination against people living with HIV must be in place and enforced. And we know that an effective response must involve people affected by HIV and AIDS because they know best what needs to be done.

Today the greatest strides made in HIV prevention involve young people. According to UNAIDS, HIV prevalence rates are going down among youth in several countries owing to increased condom use and behaviour change. An HIV-free future demands youth leadership and comprehensive youth-friendly services. Every person should be able to make informed decisions free of coercion, discrimination and violence.

Given the rising rates of HIV infection among women, UNFPA joins UNAIDS and the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS in calling for the elimination of gender inequality and violence that fuel the pandemic. We call on governments and the international community to secure women's rights, invest more money in AIDS programmes that work for women, and to allocate more seats at the tables where life and death decisions are made.

Integrating HIV/AIDS and sexual and reproductive health services will help put a halt to AIDS. UNFPA is working with partners to better link maternal health and family planning with HIV prevention and AIDS treatment. If we are to stop AIDS and keep the promise, we must guarantee universal access to reproductive health as world leaders have agreed.