

## SPEECH

**By: Mrs. Akie ABE, First Lady of Japan**

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Thank you, thank you all, so very much.

I am not a person of big ambition.

I have never expected that one day I would be working for the world-wide fight against AIDS. But now, joining you, I feel grateful. ....I really do.

Indeed, I have realized that this is what I have long wanted to do myself. You have shown me my new self, for which I am thankful, very much.

That was in one of the countries in South East Asia, about ten years ago, when I could not close my eyes. My eyes were wide open because what was in front of me was something so unbelievable.

It was a pile of bags full of human bones.

Yes, in that hospital, lost lives due to AIDS were so great in number, there was a mountain of bags. I could not even cry. But then the patients, all very much sick, came to me smiling, and each gave me a hug.

At that time, I realized. The last obstacle, in our way of living together, had lied deep in my heart. The last one meter to embracing people living with HIV, equally, was also in my heart.

Much progress has been made.

However, a mere one meter. That is the gulf so deep that continues to trap us all with unjustifiable discrimination toward people living with HIV.

It is what prevents us from boldly advancing to ending AIDS, and to building a society where all of us, with or without the HIV, could live happily together, helping each other.

Over time, in some of the African countries, and also in Tokyo, Japan, I've got acquainted with people living with HIV, like Hiroshi Hasegawa-san, and worked closely with them. I have developed a thought that how we interact with, or close our eyes toward, persons living with HIV, is a reflection of who we are.

It is a reflection of whether we can speak out for the socially marginalized, and therefore, often times, voiceless.

I do not know how I can give any added value to the Commission.

But I have made up my mind that throughout the rest of my life, I should work as a self-appointed, public amplifier, amplifying the voice of the voiceless, and the cause that in our life time we must work to end AIDS.

We are still in a long tunnel. But we must proceed, and never stop.

Thank you all once again for having me as your peer.

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The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) leads and inspires the world to achieve its shared vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. UNAIDS unites the efforts of 11 UN organizations—UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, UN Women, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank—and works closely with global and national partners to maximize results for the AIDS response. Learn more at [unaids.org](http://unaids.org) and connect with us on Facebook and Twitter.

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