

PRESS RELEASE

World leaders call for accelerated action and smarter investments to Fast-Track the end of the AIDS epidemic

Innovation and new means of implementation will ensure countries deliver on 2030 AIDS promises

NEW YORK/GENEVA, 27 September 2015—The Governments of Kenya and Malawi, together with UNAIDS, are leading an urgent call for new investment and improvements in health service delivery to put the world on course to ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030.

The call was made during a high-level event at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on the eve of the historic seventieth session of the United Nations General Assembly. Leaders from around the world gathered at the event to pledge their support and commitment to the UNAIDS Fast-Track approach and to finding new and innovative ways of delivering essential health care to people most in need.

“We believe we are on the right track, but reaching the Fast-Track Targets won’t be easy,” said President Peter Mutharika of Malawi. “We must expand and scale up HIV services. Malawi is ready to see this journey through and end AIDS by 2030.” Malawi has already taken bold steps to reach its targets, having recently announced that it will provide antiretroviral therapy to everyone living with HIV as of April 2016.

The AIDS response to date has been the most successful response to any modern epidemic. There have been massive reductions in new HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths over the past 15 years and more than 15 million people now have access to antiretroviral therapy.

To take the AIDS response forward, UNAIDS has developed a Fast-Track approach to reach a set of time-bound targets by 2020. The targets include 90% of all people living with HIV knowing their HIV status, 90% of people who know their status having access to treatment and 90% of people on treatment having suppressed viral loads. They also include reducing new HIV infections by 75% and achieving zero discrimination.

“Over the last decades we have made great progress in combatting AIDS but it is still unfinished business,” said President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya. “We must all continue to galvanize additional resources for the AIDS response, both international and domestic. We must invest in HIV prevention, care and treatment services because there is simply no other option.”

The massive scale-up of services over the past 15 years has resulted in 30 million new HIV infections and 8 million deaths averted over the last 15 years.

“It is no longer a dream; we have to believe that we can end AIDS. Unfortunately, many people still continue to be stigmatized and we just need to push from every front to make sure that no one is left behind,” said President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta of Mali.

Putting people at the centre was one of the ways identified as essential to ending the AIDS epidemic. Where people at higher risk of HIV infection and people living with HIV are empowered to realize their human rights, uptake of HIV services has increased.

“I believe the AIDS epidemic can be ended within the next 15 years,” said Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS. “Now, more than ever, we need means of implementation that are smart, efficient, sustainable and, most importantly, people-centred.”

Without inclusion and equity, key populations and young people will continue to be left behind. The meeting heard from Elijah Zacchary, a 12-year-old Kenyan boy living with HIV, who spoke of his hopes for the future. “Presidents, thank you for making the promise to end AIDS by 2030, but we must make sure that all children have access to treatment,” said Elijah. “My dream is that by the time I am 27 years old there shall be no more stigma and I am still able to take my medication every day.”

The leaders called for greater engagement of communities and innovative, community-led approaches to the delivery of health services. Innovation in community delivery is breaking the logjam in the capacity of health services to deliver life-saving prevention and treatment services and needs to be adequately funded and supported.

“To end AIDS in Lesotho, we need to integrate HIV into primary health care, adequately resource our best foot soldiers—the village health workers—mobilize communities through innovative approaches advocated by our Majesty the King and better coordinate support from our partners,” said Pakalitha Mosisili, Prime Minister of Lesotho.

Big challenges remain to end the epidemic. Of the 36.9 million people living with HIV globally, 17.1 million do not know they have the virus and need to be reached with HIV testing services, and around 22 million do not have access to HIV treatment, including 1.8 million children.

“We in the Caribbean believe that we can be the first region in the world to end AIDS. Going forward with this aspirational goal requires increased investment, which is part of the global solidarity that we are here for today,” said Timothy Harris, Prime Minister of Saint Kitts and Nevis.

At current levels, there is an annual gap of US\$ 12 billion globally between the resources available and the resources needed to reach the UNAIDS 2020 Fast-Track Targets and end the AIDS epidemic by 2030.

Earlier in the day, President Barack Obama spoke at the Sustainable Development Summit and announced that the United States of America had set new targets to reach more people with life-saving HIV prevention and treatment services, with a particular focus on young women and adolescent girls.

Heather Higginbottom, Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources of the United States, said, “We stand together to celebrate that progress, to demonstrate our collective resolve, and to meet the challenge before us in the new global goals: to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030.”

Over the next five years the AIDS response requires front-loading investments and increasing the diversity of investment, innovative delivery mechanisms and partnerships to ensure that no one is left behind, especially adolescents, young people and key populations. Ensuring commodity security to sustain the AIDS response, focusing on locations, populations and programmes that deliver the greatest impact and addressing discrimination and gender inequality and committing to people-centred approaches grounded in human rights will reap huge benefits by 2030: 21 million AIDS-related deaths averted; 28 million new HIV infections averted; and 5.9 million new infections among children averted.

“There is a generation in jeopardy. Young people are falling through the cracks in the AIDS response, said Charlize Theron, Messenger of Peace for the United Nations and founder of the Charlize Theron Africa Outreach Project. “But there is reason to hope, we know what works—empowering young people to take care of their health.”

Karen Dunaway, a young woman from Honduras living with HIV, said, “We adolescents and young people should have the space to participate meaningfully in decision-making at all levels, including policy-making and implementation. Governments must work with civil society and young people to ensure accountability. Together we must break the prejudice and stigma so that all young people have access to services.”

Better health outcomes will support the entire Sustainable Development Goals framework and not only lead to healthier lives, but also help alleviate poverty, reduce discrimination and improve economic security.

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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 towards ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030. Learn more at unaids.org and connect with us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.