

## PRESS RELEASE

### **UNAIDS Executive Director sets out HIV/COVID-19 landscape at opening of PCB meeting**

**GENEVA, 24 June 2020**—The 46th meeting of the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board commenced on 23 June 2020. Held for the first time as a virtual meeting, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting will see three days of discussion and reflection on the HIV response, the interconnectedness between the twin pandemics of HIV and COVID-19 and the work of the Secretariat and the Joint Programme.

In her [opening address](#) to the PCB meeting, Winnie Byanyima, the Executive Director of UNAIDS, presented an overview of the HIV/COVID-19 landscape in mid-2020 and told the online audience that the HIV epidemic is still urgent, unfinished business.

“Even before COVID-19 we were not on track to meet our targets for 2020. Now the COVID-19 crisis risks blowing us way off course,” warned Ms Byanyima. “As a Joint Programme, we must address the deeper challenges to recover from this crisis to beat both pandemics and foster safe, equitable and resilient societies,” she added.

Ms Byanyima urged countries to learn the lessons from a history of unequal access to HIV services and apply them to the fight against COVID-19. She noted that millions of people died from AIDS-related illnesses while there were medicines available that could have saved their lives—leaving access to medicines to pharmaceutical companies resulted in prices that were too high for people in developing countries.

In the same vein, Ms Byanyima reiterated her call for a People’s Vaccine for COVID-19, with an international agreement that any vaccines and treatments discovered for COVID-19 be made available to all countries. “Developing countries must not be priced out,” she said.

The Executive Director also spoke about the increasing relevance of UNAIDS during a new pandemic and how it has a unique combination of experience and expertise that can help ensure that investments in the COVID-19 response reflect the vital lessons learned from the HIV response.

Supporting HIV treatment and prevention, working on the front line with communities, supporting human rights and gender equality and campaigning against stigma and discrimination—these are part of UNAIDS’ core mandate, she told the meeting. UNAIDS will continue to deliver on that mandate and reach the people who are left the furthest behind, but will also move the global policy needle and tackle the inequalities that place people at greater risk of both HIV and COVID-19, she said.

Turning to the next global UNAIDS strategy, Ms Byanyima committed that the critical new strategy, designed to shape an improved HIV response, will reflect the widest possible input and engagement—from the PCB, its constituencies and the global AIDS community. She

suggested that an ambitious draft strategy be presented to the 47th meeting of the PCB in December 2020, with a final version to be reviewed and adopted by the PCB in March 2021.

Ms Byanyima updated the PCB on the internal transformation of UNAIDS, outlining how she will bring feminist leadership principles to help change the culture of the organization. A series of other steps—including a revised performance management system and an independent ethics function—that will ensure that the transformation continues to be on course were announced.

Ms Byanyima ended her address with a reminder of the huge returns that are seen from investing in UNAIDS. She said that it is vital that UNAIDS, along with funding sources such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and the United States President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, be fully funded.

“As COVID-19 has shown, investments in HIV principles, approaches and infrastructure and expertise extend far beyond the AIDS response,” she said.

### **Contact**

UNAIDS Geneva | Sophie Barton-Knott | tel. +41 79 514 68 96 | [bartonknotts@unaids.org](mailto:bartonknotts@unaids.org)

UNAIDS Media | tel. +41 22 791 4237 | [communications@unaids.org](mailto:communications@unaids.org)

### [UNAIDS](#)

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 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals. Learn more at [unaids.org](http://unaids.org) and connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.