

PRESS STATEMENT

UNAIDS pays tribute to AIDS champion Benjamin William Mkapa, former President of the United Republic of Tanzania

GENEVA, 24 July 2020—UNAIDS is saddened by the death of the former President of the United Republic of Tanzania, Benjamin William Mkapa. Mr Mkapa was a bold and compassionate leader who worked to promote peace in eastern Africa and was committed to ending AIDS, being credited with much of the United Republic of Tanzania's success in responding to HIV.

"I've learned with sadness that the former President of the United Republic of Tanzania, Benjamin Mkapa, has passed away," said Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director of UNAIDS. "He was a tireless champion for peace and an AIDS-free Africa. UNAIDS pays tribute to him for his courage, his strength and his leadership."

In 1999, he declared HIV a national disaster and quickly spearheaded the country's national response to HIV by establishing the Tanzania Commission for AIDS. He also formed the Tanzania Parliamentarians AIDS Coalition (TAPAC) in 2001, which united the President and Prime Minister, members of parliament and other high-level politicians in the response to HIV.

Some of TAPAC's key achievements include adopting progressive legislation on HIV and the creation of the Standing Committee on HIV/AIDS Affairs in 2008, which mainstreamed HIV in the work of the parliament. In addition to increasing the national AIDS budget, Tanzanian members of parliament, through TAPAC, raised funds for HIV projects to support nongovernmental organizations, people living with HIV and vulnerable populations.

During his farewell speech upon retirement, on the eve of World AIDS Day in 2005, Mr Mkapa bid the country farewell with a plea to all citizens to find out their HIV status. He asked people to take a voluntary HIV test in order to enable them to make informed decisions and to seek treatment if needed.

After his retirement, he continued to be actively involved in the AIDS response and became one of the founding members of the Champions for an AIDS-Free Generation, a distinguished group of former presidents and influential African leaders committed to ending AIDS.

He was the patron of the Benjamin William Mkapa Foundation which has reached millions of Tanzanians and continues to improve rural health services, health and the well-being of women, men and children, including people living with and affected by HIV.

UNAIDS expresses its deepest condolences to Mr Mkapa's family and to all who knew and loved him. The AIDS response has lost one of its most committed champions.

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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 and connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.