

Speech

Panel Intervention

“Cooperation for Development Alliances for Addressing the Feminization of the Epidemic and Move Towards Universal Access”

**The Fourth Meeting of the First Ladies and Women Leaders
Coalition of Latin America on Women and AIDS**

The Dominican Republic, 28 March 2008

**Speech by
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Excellencies, First Ladies of Latin America and the Caribbean, Distinguished Guests, Friends and colleagues,

It is a very great honor to be in this distinguished panel today on the topic of alliances to address the feminization of the epidemic. Thank you my co-speakers and colleagues for your leadership.

This event comes at a critical moment for the global response to AIDS and for women and girls. We know that AIDS continues to have a disproportionate impact on women and girls in many parts of the world.

Take our host country, where a 2007 survey has shown that HIV prevalence rates among females 15-24 years old were much higher than the rates among males in the same age group.

We know that at the global level there is real progress in the response to AIDS.

As I said yesterday, there are 3 million people on treatment up from 230,000 in 2001 and globally there seems to be gender parity in terms of ARV coverage. There are unprecedented resources available for the response; incidence is coming down in a number of countries – in 11 out of 15 high prevalence countries with sufficient data. HIV incidence among young women has declined since 2001.

And yet, we still have many critical challenges. Let me mention three:

One is sustaining and strengthening leadership at all levels. We see this leadership here – networks of women living with HIV; prominent women leaders.

We will see it at the General Assembly in June, at the High Level Meeting, where the world will come together to review progress towards Universal Access. 147 of 192 Member States have reported on their epidemics.

This is unprecedented in the history of the epidemic – 95 per cent of the countries in Latin America and 100 per cent in the Caribbean reported. THIS is leadership from multiple stakeholders in countries – a veritable alliance to present how each country is responding.

We will have important data on the response for women and girls – what is working and what isn't. And the global community and its leaders will need to focus on what isn't working.

The second challenge then is to take this data and understand what makes the response better for women and girls. To do this we must use existing alliances and forge new ones. For example forge alliances with the growing number of men's organizations focusing on women's issues; address the drivers of the epidemic, the persistent gender inequality underpinning the epidemic; identify, resource and implement relevant and sustainable programmes that work for women and girls and that are costed and prioritized in National Action Plans – capacitate communities and community based organizations to run them.

Thirdly, we must ensure existing alliances can be sustained in the long term. For AIDS will be with us for generations to come. So when existing alliances cry out for support to sustain their incredible work, energy, dynamism and commitment, we must listen and respond.

I was in Amsterdam last week at a meeting of global and national networks of people living with HIV as they seek to determine how to sustain themselves, coordinate their work, build the next generation of activists, and ensure there is no duplication of what they do.

And this brings me to our gathering this week; we have in this room a unique alliance - women and men leaders and a variety of organizations. We have the remarkable and courageous leadership of women living with HIV who have persevered and carried the task for so long.

We have the members of the international community – in short we have a powerful alliance – a shining star in the firmament. Let us vow to continue to forge this alliance – partner with other alliances and move the response forward and fight the Universal Access pledge for women and girls.

And we in the UNAIDS family are committed to this alliance. The April meeting of the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board – a unique alliance in of governments, people living with HIV and UN system organizations – will consider and agree gender guidance which will provide all stakeholders in countries with a tool to:

- Know your epidemic in gender terms;
- Ensure capacity; and
- Scale up the response.

We will support countries in their development of proposals for Round 8 – focusing on women and girls – because for the first time Global Fund guidelines **specifically** call for attention to women and girls in funding proposals.

Finally, we will continue to support countries in their scale up to Universal Access.

Together we can and will finally halt and reverse the epidemic for women and girls.

Thank you all for your exceptional leadership.