

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

--

ADDRESS TO INTERNATIONAL AIDS CONFERENCE

Mexico City, 3 August 2008

*Señor Presidente,
Señor Primer Ministro,
Distinguidos Ministros,
Excelencias,
Paladines de la sociedad civil,*

Holà, Mexico!

I am honoured and humbled to stand here among so many leaders in the AIDS response. Your dedication and resolve is what will ultimately make universal access to HIV prevention and treatment a reality.

It is fitting that this conference is taking place in Latin America -- the source of some of the most dynamic responses to AIDS, but also home to some of the greatest challenges.

And it is encouraging that more people than ever before are accessing HIV prevention and treatment in low and middle income countries, such as the nations in this region.

This is the outcome of a massive effort by everyone here at this conference -- and by the millions more who have stayed behind to work in hospitals, clinics, and communities.

But an even greater effort is now required.

Most countries still have a long way to go to meet the goal they set two years ago at the United Nations General Assembly -- the goal to scale up towards universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010. As a result, they will have great difficulty in reaching the Millennium Development Goal of halting and reversing the spread of AIDS by 2015.

This will have repercussions on many fronts. For halting and reversing the spread of AIDS is not only a Millennium Development Goal in itself; how we fare in fighting AIDS will impact all our efforts to cut poverty and improve nutrition reduce child mortality and improve maternal health, curb the spread of malaria and TB and strengthen health systems. Conversely, progress towards the other Goals is critical to progress on AIDS -- from education to the empowerment of women and girls.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As the fight against AIDS nears the end of its third decade, we are still facing a huge shortfall in resources. The responses to HIV and AIDS require long-term and sustained financing. As more people go on treatment and live longer, budgets will have to increase considerably over the next few decades. In the most affected countries, donors will have to provide the majority of the funding.

I warmly congratulate the United States Government on the new legislation that will allow for 48 billion dollars to be spent on the fight against AIDS, TB and malaria over five years. I also welcome the commitment of the G8 to keep working towards the goal of universal access to HIV prevention and treatment by 2010.

Just as important, in most countries, stigma against people living with HIV remains a grave challenge. One third of countries still do not have laws to protect people living with HIV. In most countries, discrimination remains legal against women, men who have sex with men, sex workers, drug users, and ethnic minorities. This must change.

I call on all countries to live up to their commitments to enact or enforce legislation outlawing discrimination against people living with HIV and members of vulnerable groups. I call on them to follow Mexico's bold example and pass laws against homophobia.

Since taking up the position of Secretary General of the United Nations, some my most moving and inspiring experiences have been meetings with colleagues and others living with HIV. They are wonderfully courageous and motivated people, and should serve as an example to us all on how to act with dignity in the face of adversity. That they should be discriminated against, including through restrictions on their ability to travel between countries, should fill us all with shame.

I welcome the action taken by the United States Government to lift restrictions on entry for people living with HIV.

I call on politicians around the world to speak out against discrimination and protect the rights of people living with and affected by HIV, for schools to teach respect, for religious leaders to preach tolerance, and for the media to condemn prejudice in all its forms.

In other words, I call on all those in positions of power and influence to remove one of the greatest barriers to achieving universal access.

This link was plain to see in the 2008 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic, launched by UNAIDS last week. One of the most striking points was the impact of laws against discrimination on HIV prevention. In countries without laws to protect sex workers, drug users, and men who have sex with men, only a fraction of the population has access to prevention.

Conversely, in countries with legal protection and the protection of human rights for these people, many more have access to services. As a result, there are fewer infections, less demand for antiretroviral treatment, and fewer deaths.

Not only is it unethical not to protect these groups: it makes no sense from a health perspective. It hurts all of us.

Dear friends,

When I first spoke in the General Assembly about AIDS, I promised that the UN will deliver as one on AIDS. I will do all I can to make that happen. I will work to mobilize funding and to ensure that AIDS will remain a system-wide priority for the United Nations. You can count on me.

Muchas gracias. Thank you very much.