

Speech

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23rd meeting of the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board

Geneva, 16 December 2008

**Speech by
Mr Michel Sidibé who was appointed
the new UNAIDS executive director
taking effect January 1, 2009**

Mr Chair, dear members of the PCB, observers, colleagues and friends,

I would like to begin by thanking every single person in this room, and so very many who are not here, for the work you do, for the kindness you have shown me, for the friendship you have extended, and for your abiding commitment to people who are suffering as a result of the HIV epidemic.

UNAIDS symbolizes the power of cooperation, and with your unwavering support, UNAIDS has come a long way under the excellent leadership of Peter Piot.

Peter recognized the necessity and power of cooperation as he reached out to diverse constituencies affected by the epidemic. He led UNAIDS and the global response with passion and vision.

I would like to pay tribute to you, Peter, on behalf of all the people who have so diligently worked to defeat this scourge. Let me applaud you for what you have done for the world.

We are at a turning point in the epidemic

Building on Peter's extraordinary legacy, I will tackle the challenges we now confront with a profound sense of determination and optimism – for much can be achieved -- and will continue to be achieved.

I will assume my new post at a critical time. We have shattered the silence and built a global movement. As a result, we are delivering treatment and hope to nearly four million people.

This is thanks to the courageous efforts of individuals who have stood up to prejudice, injustice and indifference, and who dared to dream of a different future. They matched vision with bold and strategic action.

But an unprecedented, collective effort is still required to prevent an estimated 7000 new HIV infections each day -- to prevent an estimated 6000 deaths each day. We command the knowledge and resources to prevent deaths. As James Grant, former Executive Director of UNICEF, said, our morality must march in step with our growing capacity for doing good.

I will do everything in my power to bring about an AIDS reversal – where less people become infected than are put on treatment.

On the road ahead

I will be relentless in the pursuit of this goal. Earlier this year Secretary General Ban Ki Moon emphasized the need to 'infuse' our work "with a sense of speed and urgency" to produce results for people. We cannot afford to let him – or them – down.

While we are faced with drastic changes in the world like Peter was describing, we do urgently need to recognize that it is time to put our collective wisdom together so that we can move decisively, with a clear focus on results—on action, delivery, and effectiveness.

We must ensure that people living with HIV remain at the centre of the response, that the response is driven from within countries, that it remains inclusive and fosters full participation of civil society and particularly vulnerable groups.

We must not only ensure that AIDS remains at the top of the political agenda. We must also practice prevention diplomacy. By this I mean building a vast, international political movement for HIV prevention.

We must make UNAIDS the world's reference point for AIDS policies and programmes by enhancing the collective leadership of the Cosponsors and better exploiting the range of expertise of the UN system to serve the National Response and make Global Fund money work for the people.

At the same time, we must:

- usher in a new era of accountability,
- address stigma and discrimination and deliver on the human rights agenda,
- increase the sustainability of investments,
- leverage our work to achieve broader health systems and development outcomes, and
- harness science and technology to make further inroads into prevention and treatment.

Building the road ahead

I foresee the transition to take place over the next 3 months. I will use this time to reach out to all relevant stakeholders. I appreciate the support I have already received from many in this room and beyond.

I will be supported in this transition by a small team.

I am fortunate that in the work ahead, I will be supported in all my decisions by a capable and experienced UNAIDS staff. As a matter of priority, I will continue to actively listen to and engage with my colleagues.

Je souhaite répéter ici mes remerciements à M. Ban Ki Moon, Secrétaire Général des Nations Unies, pour la confiance qu'il a placée en moi.

Et à vous aussi, je veux dire ma gratitude sans limite pour votre confiance. Je suis profondément reconnaissant de votre soutien et de vos encouragements.

Jonathan Mann aimait dire que c'est la façon dont on définit un problème qui décide comment on va le résoudre. C'est ainsi que je souhaite que nous définissions notre lutte contre le SIDA : comme un défi contre notre vision commune de l'humanisme.

I have expressed my heartfelt appreciation to Secretary General Ban Ki Moon for the confidence he has placed in me.

Similarly, I would like to take this opportunity to express my boundless gratitude for the confidence you have placed in me. I am deeply touched and inspired by your generous encouragement.

Jonathan Mann had a favorite saying: that the way you define a problem will determine what you do about it. That is what I would like us to remember in our struggle against AIDS. We must define AIDS as test of our common humanity.