

ADDRESS BY: Michel Sidibé, Executive Director, UNAIDS
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From words to deeds: from talk to action

Mr Chair, Friends and Distinguished colleagues,

The past three days have demonstrated the unique nature of UNAIDS. We bring to the table diverse constituencies and perspectives. I have reported to you on the work of the Programme and my vision. In turn, you have responded with frankness and friendship. Your support and concern for the global AIDS response reflects our shared ownership of this Programme and for our collective future.

There are too many of you to thank individually for your contributions, but I want to acknowledge the leadership exercised by our AIDS Ambassadors from El Salvador, France, the Netherlands, and Sweden as well as the Secretary-General's Special Envoys who joined us in our discussions.

I opened yesterday's meeting with a call for hope—for without hope our struggle is meaningless. But I cautioned against a false hope—we need to transform ourselves if we are to succeed in ending this epidemic. As I reflect on our deliberations, I feel renewed and inspired by your support, ideas and sense of purpose.

We are in the midst of crisis—and it calls for change. And let me remind you that this is not merely a financial crisis. We face so-called competing priorities and AIDS fatigue. But we are also in the midst of an historic effort to achieve universal access and the world's most determined drive against poverty.

In my view, we are at a frontier of where UNAIDS goes next. The Secretary-General challenged the global health community last week to 'up our game.' I feel that we have begun to do just that—to depart from business as usual. This departure is evident on a number of fronts.

First, let me thank you for endorsing our Outcome Framework and UBW—particularly for your encouragement and support to take AIDS out of isolation. The AIDS + MDGs movement offers so many opportunities. At risk of getting burned, I welcome the fire that the UK has lit under my feet. With the Cosponsors over the next months, we will further improve the way that we monitor performance; to measure the links between investments and results. This will form the basis of my annual report to the PCB next year.

But I am reminded of advice that my father passed down to me: the best leadership is one that invests trust in those it leads. Strong leadership provides strategic direction and allows followers to get on with the job. I welcome the suggestion of the Honourable Ambassador from Denmark that—with respect to future PCB decisions—the Board concentrate on strategic issues that afford me sufficient space to effectively manage UNAIDS. This does not mean giving me a blank check but rather to empower me to deliver on my mandate—and that of UNAIDS. And to hold me personally accountable for results and performance in the service of the AIDS response.

Second, your resolute support for radically ramped up efforts on prevention is hugely encouraging. The discussions reminded us of the range of challenges before us. From sexual violence against women, lack of services for injecting drug users, punitive laws that impede public health, gross violations of human rights, grotesque forms of stigma and discrimination to harmful social and gender norms that govern sexual relations.

But you have been clear that we have reasons for hope—prevention pessimism is misplaced. We heard of evidence-based interventions that work. Actions that save lives and restore dignity.

I will engage in prevention diplomacy in every opportunity at my disposal, but let me also acknowledge that it is in communities that best practices are developed—where the difficult conversations and courageous and innovative approaches are initiated. We heard this morning the impassioned and yet rational demand—people need to be seen as part of the solution not the problem. I fully agree with your calls to make non-discrimination the fourth pillar of the AIDS response—and hope to make it an agenda item next time we meet.

Third, let me say a few words on my proposals to reform the Secretariat. To make it more fit for purpose as we move into a new phase. Countries must be at the core of our Organization. To deliver on these priorities we need to do better, focus on results and shift our emphasis. We need to further enhance our advocacy—on many neglected issues. To reach out to friends with whom we do not always agree. We need to do this from a position of strength—with good evidence and strategic information. Yet only truly strategic information will enable us to address the political blockages to ensuring universal access.

Fourth, as we face, and overcome the crisis, we are reminded that we need one another more than ever. Partnership is the logical response to interdependence – and of course a solution to our own limited capacity. We have strong and meaningful involvement of civil society—with people living with HIV, with sex workers, and women’s groups.

Prospects to deepen and widen our strategic partnerships are at hand. Here I look to the start of a special relationship with PEPFAR. The draft PEPFAR Partnership Framework reinforces the “three ones”, strengthens country ownership, enhances accountability—and supports our collective efforts to ensure sustainable responses. I also look to a renewed partnership with the Global Fund under the leadership of my close friend Michel Kazatchine—the strength of which will be measured by the indicators that I mentioned yesterday. Much can be gained from new ways of

working with Francophone and Lusophone countries. I will also move quickly to work with partners to implement the UNAIDS Action Framework: Addressing Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV.

My dedicated staff inspires me. I am pleased to have the trust of the staff association. But I have also listened to your concerns. I intend “to walk my talk” and work in an inclusive manner to solve these problems. The Board and people living with HIV expect nothing less of us.

Achieving universal access and linking the AIDS response to the wider development agenda is not what we should do—it is what we must do. It is not only a matter of finding opportunities, but making them. I thank you for your commitment and look forward to working with you in the coming months and years to make AIDS+MDGs a reality.

As we close our meeting, I wish to remind you that we are at an important juncture. The pivotal dates for universal access and the MDGs are just around corner. In New York, the General Assembly is discussing ways to respond to the global economic crisis. I call on countries to avoid the temptations of cuts to the soft social sectors. Now is the time to invest in strengthening safety nets and protecting the poor. It will pay off. It is a moral imperative. Let us keep faith in our commitments.

I leave this PCB meeting enriched by your guidance and strengthened by your support. Please be assured that my dedication is unwavering and it will not fail you. Each action I take is anchored in my strong desire to make a real difference in the lives of people living with and affected by HIV. The child of Timbuktu in me will not leave behind the realities of affected communities in Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Europe.

I hope that I can continue to count on you as we face the multiple challenges that are before us: prevention, access to care and treatment, the struggle against stigma and discrimination - all at the service of improving the living conditions, the health, and the development of those we serve. Beyond the challenge of HIV, I commit to using my position with the United Nations Secretary-General to advance the Millennium Development Goals.

Once again, let me thank you for the respect you have shown, your confidence in me, and the spirit of solidarity that has guided our mutual work over the past 3 days.

I wish to thank the Chair of the Board for his openness, skills and courtesy for which we should all be thankful.

I suggest to the members, friends and observers of the Board that we are at an important juncture today—on a breakthrough for AIDS. We are pioneers at this exciting frontier.

Our commitment to transformation needs to be matched by a commitment to action. Let us not fall victim to Abigail Adams’ warning “We have too many high sounding words, and too few actions that correspond with them.” We risk doing too little; not too much.

Allow me to use a quote that I heard from Jim Grant

SPEECH: From words to deeds: from talk to action

You see things; and you say, 'Why?' But I dream things that never were; and I say, "Why not?"¹

In our spirit of innovation backed by action, let us continue to put a human face on our efforts and ensure people affected remain at the heart of our dreams.

Thank you for your dedication and your courage.

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UNAIDS is an innovative joint venture of the United Nations, bringing together the efforts and resources of the UNAIDS Secretariat and ten UN system organizations in the AIDS response. The Secretariat headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland—with staff on the ground in more than 80 countries. Coherent action on AIDS by the UN system is coordinated in countries through UN theme groups, and joint programmes on AIDS. UNAIDS' Cosponsors include UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank. Visit the UNAIDS Web site at www.unaids.org

¹ George Bernard Shaw, *"Back to Methuselah" (1921), part 1, act 1*