

International Women's Day 2010

Message from UNAIDS Executive Director Mr. Michel Sidibé

Geneva, 8 March, 2010 – I pay tribute to women all over the world who have tirelessly supported the AIDS response—grandmothers, mothers, wives, sisters and daughters. The impact of AIDS would have been even more severe without their resilience, contributions and sacrifices.

Yet we have failed in protecting women and girls by denying them equal rights and equal opportunities. Nearly half the people living with HIV in the world are women. In sub-Saharan Africa more women are infected than men. AIDS is the leading cause of death in women of reproductive age worldwide.

Gender inequities, violence, lack of access to education, health and economic opportunities are making women vulnerable to HIV.

But we can change that.

We can end violence against women and girls.

We can stop new HIV infections among women and their children.

We can remove punitive laws, policies, practices, stigma and discrimination that block women.

We can enhance social protection for women.

We can ensure that all women living with HIV access treatment when they need it.

And most importantly -

We can restore their dignity and rights.

To do this we must challenge the status quo—men and women together. Innovative programmes must bring women to the forefront of decision making. We have to create a climate of security where women can access health and welfare services without fear or coercion. UNAIDS will support this through its five-year action plan *Agenda for Accelerated Country Action for Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV*.

Already change is happening. Women's groups are uniting to speak out against all injustices and transforming communities. It is our duty to support these remarkable efforts.

Let us not forget as a Chinese proverb rightly says—women hold up half the sky.

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UNAIDS

Leveraging the AIDS response, UNAIDS works to build political action and to promote the rights all of people for better results for global health and development. Globally, it sets policy and is the source of HIV-related data. In countries, UNAIDS brings together the resources of the UNAIDS Secretariat and 10 UN system organizations for coordinated and accountable efforts to unite the world against AIDS. www.unaids.org