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OCCASION: National Launch
HIV Counselling and Testing Campaign in South Africa

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Golden Moment

Your Excellency, President Zuma,

Dear Friends and Colleagues.

Today South Africa is taking a bold and historic step to break the trajectory of the AIDS epidemic. This step is nothing less than awe-inspiring. I am exhilarated and bursting with pride to be an African on this day.

What President Zuma and the leadership of South Africa have committed to is bigger than any other programme scale-up we have seen so far. It is historic. This is the first time a country plans to scale up so quickly to so many people.

Today's historic event has been made possible only due to the remarkable leadership, commitment and determination of President Zuma and his capable team.

President Zuma, your leadership and vision has helped to transform today's launch into the beginning of unprecedented social movement which will help keep African society vibrant and healthy.

For the millions of people without a voice and for hundreds of thousands of families waiting to see the day when their children are born without HIV, this campaign is the biggest national mobilization around any one single issue since the end of apartheid.

The goal of testing 15 million people by the end of 2011 represents the largest programme scale up for HIV we have seen so far. The goal to cut the rate of new HIV infections in half by the year 2011 is an ambitious but achievable goal. The political will and commitment to reach this goal has never been stronger.

This Sunday, 25 April 2010 will be remembered for generations to come as the turning point in the fight against HIV in Africa and globally. It will help us to start breaking the trajectory of this devastating epidemic.

I say to the people, communities and leaders of South Africa – today you are writing a new page of Africa's history by being the architects of how to end the tragedy of HIV.

Country-focused response

South Africans, today you are setting the standard for today's AIDS response. You are a sterling example of commitments honoured; promises kept. You embody what I have been calling for amid a changing and challenging AIDS epidemic. And that is a country-focused response that values and rewards leadership, national ownership, mutual accountability, social justice and full involvement of people living with and affected by HIV.

Country-focused doesn't mean government ownership, but embraces all partners—civil society, affected communities, the private-for-profit sector, etc. South Africa already funds more than two thirds of its own AIDS response and committed \$1 billion dollars to the AIDS response in 2010—a 30% increase over last year.

Country-focused also means committing to a process of “know your epidemic; know your response.” It is not just a slogan—it is about understanding who is affected and at risk, and why, and what resources need to be allocated to them.

I am confident South Africa will use this golden moment to catalyze a prevention revolution. This revolution will recognize the vast variations in HIV epidemics within this country's own borders. It will recognize that most-at-risk groups require more highly targeted prevention resources. This is particularly important in an environment that is asking us to be more effective with constrained resources.

Indeed, South Africa has committed to evidence-based, scientific approaches to testing and treatment, and a people-focused strategy that engages all citizens. President Zuma has called for every South African to know his or her HIV status.

Testing for prevention

A national HIV testing campaign will do more than reveal individuals' status. I expect this campaign to launch innumerable conversations. In the workplace, around the dinner table, in the media—about issues that are sometimes difficult to talk about. Sexuality, violence against women, intergenerational and transactional sex, youth and sex education and the rights and expectations of people living with HIV.

Testing is also a gateway for connecting individuals with other maternal, child and sexual health services—like identifying high-risk pregnancies, detecting other infectious diseases, and meeting the demand for family planning among sero-discordant couples.

One of the greatest gifts of this far-reaching testing campaign will be the dramatic impact on mother-to-child transmission. Women who know their status can reduce the risk of passing the virus to their children almost to zero through simple PMTCT interventions. South Africa can be one of the first African countries to virtually eliminate one of the top three modes of HIV transmission, and end the horror of paediatric AIDS.

Treatment for prevention

PMTCT is just one way that treatment is playing a role in prevention. Treatment and prevention are interconnected in exciting ways.

Evidence shows that ARVs can reduce sexual HIV transmission as well. This could have tremendous value for sero-discordant couples. This is the type of game-changing, out-of-the-box approach that will really bend the curve of HIV incidence and bring epidemics under control.

Nearly 1 million South Africans are already accessing antiretroviral treatment – the biggest national HIV treatment programme in the world. This campaign promises to expand treatment to 80% of those in need by 2011. This is a great opportunity to South Africa to also take the lead in proving the value of treatment for prevention.

World solidarity

Undoubtedly, this revolutionary push that begins with testing will uncover up to a million unknown cases of HIV among South Africans. A million more who will need treatment and other services. South Africa needs the support of its development partners more than ever. These partners have an obligation to align their priorities to the national priorities. To ensure adequate resources and expertise are available to meet the national targets amid new challenges.

And global leaders have a responsibility to ensure South Africa has every opportunity to succeed; to make sure this country's response remains solid and strong so it can scale up fully.

When South Africa succeeds, it inspires other African countries—and nations across the globe—to raise their own standards. This effort will demonstrate the deep impact of strong political leadership. It will motivate higher aspirations worldwide, not only in health systems, but in the sector response and the involvement of civil society, private and business sector and faith-based organizations in finally breaking the trajectory of AIDS.

This is a golden moment for the international community to match South Africa's investments in the AIDS response. An opportunity like this does not come along every year. Let us grasp it with both hands. And let us mould this golden moment into golden momentum that will last years.

Thank you.

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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