

TALKING POINTS

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Date: 31 October, 2010

Place: St. Maarten

Occasion: Tenth annual general meeting of the Pan Caribbean Partnership against HIV and AIDS (PANCAP)

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Reflection Lights the Road Ahead

Your Excellencies, Prime Minister, Ministers, ladies and gentlemen and dear friends.

It is a pleasure to be here in St. Maarten, at this timely and important point in PANCAP's history. I am truly inspired to be with so many of the very people who broke the conspiracy of silence around AIDS in the Caribbean,

I cannot acknowledge all of those here today who transformed the AIDS response in this region, but I thank you for your tireless work on behalf of people without voices.

We are all in a world that is changing so quickly. Your theme is so timely and topical: To "reflect and renew." My father said, "To reach where you want to go, you need to know where you have come from." Otherwise, you risk getting lost on the way.

Let me reflect on 10 years ago, when the world was lost in this epidemic, not knowing how to go forward. People were saying treatment was not possible. It was too expensive and would never reach enough people. The financial resources were not there. The will was failing.

Then, my big brother, who is sitting in this room, Kofi Annan, brought us light. He pushed for a powerful pool of money that could fight the epidemic. My friends, it worked.

Infection rates are down at least 17% since Abuja. More than 5 million are people getting treatment. More than half of HIV+ pregnant women in low and middle income countries are getting PMTCT.

In the Caribbean, we are seeing 40% fewer AIDS-related deaths since 2001. More than half of those who need treatment are getting it, up from only 1% in 2004. Across the region, VCT for pregnant women is the standard.

But new infections are down just 5% over the past decade in the Caribbean—compared to 17% worldwide. The number of people living with HIV in the region has actually risen 9% since Abuja. Prevention messages are not getting through.

This is where we are today.

UNAIDS' vision: Zero discrimination. Zero new HIV infections. Zero AIDS-related deaths.

Reflections on the most vulnerable

Knowing where we are is critical to illuminate the road ahead. In Vienna, you heard me talk about UNAIDS' vision: Zero new infections, zero discrimination, and zero AIDS-related deaths.

You see that stopping discrimination is at the centre of this vision. We cannot have zero new infections or zero deaths from AIDS if we do not end stigma, discrimination, and gender inequality.

The marginalised still carry the heaviest burden. Where people have no voice—because of stigma, discrimination, prejudice, criminalization—the epidemic spreads. Where sex workers and drug users hide from the police. Where prisoners are neglected. Where women are abused by the men they love. Where men who have sex with men are treated as criminals—the epidemic spreads!

Eighty countries still criminalise homosexuality. But change is happening. In China, more than 30% of new HIV infections last year occur among men who have sex with men, but the Chinese government is determined to bring the situation into the daylight. They have passed anti-discrimination laws, and have done studies to get a clear picture of the epidemic. They are reaching out to the MSM community through civil society.

But in other places, homophobia *is* the law, and men who have sex with men face prejudice and violence.

The stigma has to stop. The stories of suicides by young gay people who were bullied in the United States have made me so sad and angry. Homophobia hurts—in the classroom and in the courtroom.

You can see it in the Caribbean. In countries without homophobic laws—like Cuba, Suriname, the Bahamas and the Dominican Republic, HIV prevalence in MSM ranges from 1% to 8%. But in countries with anti-sodomy laws, up to 1 in 3 MSM have HIV. Instead of universal access, those most at risk face universal obstacles.

I was so happy and proud when I saw that Ban Ki-moon would not drop the agenda started by Kofi. Just over a month ago, he called for all countries to end laws that discriminate against gays and lesbians, saying, “Social attitudes run deep and take time to change. But cultural considerations should not stand in the way of basic human rights.”

I also want to congratulate the Organization of American States—and its Caribbean members—for its resolution condemning acts of violence and human rights violations against people because of sexual orientation and gender identity.

This is a bright marker on our journey to zero discrimination. Leaders are taking bolder steps toward the light.

I am so pleased to be celebrating PANCAP's anniversary. This is a great opportunity for people living with HIV. The Caribbean can be first region in the developing world to end HIV related travel restrictions.

We are so close, and I hope this big meeting can produce a resolution that will lead us to 100% freedom of travel for people living with HIV.

Reflections on gender inequality

Gender violence is another shadowy, destructive force that blocks progress on HIV. Violence makes women and girls more vulnerable to HIV. It makes it difficult or impossible to negotiate condom use and even saying no to sex. It prevents women from getting HIV prevention, care and treatment services.

Now imagine yourself a teenage girl in this place--more likely to be infected with HIV than young men of your age; at high risk of forced sex.

I have just come from Liberia. I saw that after their terrible war, they are building a new country of social and economic progress. But I also saw the tragic, unacceptable impact of war on girls. So many young ones raped, facing HIV, unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions. I saw so many young girls, aged 14, 15—with HIV, raising babies with HIV.

In places like this, we must help girls and women reclaim their lives, and harness their personal power. We must help them to not be just passive recipients of our programs but actors of change.

This is the purpose of UNAIDS' Agenda for Women and Girls that we launched this year. I am sure that with leadership of PANCAP, all the Caribbean countries will review and implement the actions of this Agenda that will make such a difference to women and girls.

Prevention revolution

In Vienna, many of you heard me call for a Prevention Revolution. I hope that the Caribbean countries will join me on the front lines, and march towards our vision of zero new infections.

We must target the “hot spots” where HIV is most likely to spread. We must mobilize affected communities to fight stigma. We must expand innovative approaches like male circumcision. And we must integrate HIV testing and treatment into primary health care for the family.

Mostly, we need a revolution that casts light on the truth—about sex, sexuality, human rights and the interventions that will get us to zero.

Another “R”: Recommitment

To the conference theme of reflection and renewal. Allow me to add another “R”: recommitment.

Now is not the time to flat-line. It is the time to scale up. It is the time to face up to our responsibilities, to show integrity, to keep our commitments.

- It is time to go to scale with treatment
- It is the time to stop babies being born with HIV
- It is the time to end discrimination against the most vulnerable
- It is the time to achieve universal access.

Universal access is achievable in the Caribbean. I hope you will have a regional review and set a new Universal Access goal for 2015.

What we need is another Africa Progress Panel, but for the Caribbean. I know my brother Kofi agrees.

I want to leave you with a line from the great Caribbean poet Bob Marley. He urged us,

“Flee from hate, mischief and jealousy. Don't bury your thoughts, put your vision to reality. Wake up and live!”

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UNAIDS, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, is an innovative United Nations partnership that leads and inspires the world in achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. Learn more at unaids.org.