

AN ALLIANCE OF UNLIMITED POTENTIAL

M. Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS
13 September 2011
Place: Washington, D.C.
Bush Institute Summit to Save Lives

SPEECH

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An alliance of unlimited potential

Mr. President, Madame Secretary, Mrs. Laura Bush, Mrs. Janet Kagame, my friend Nancy Brinker, ladies and gentlemen:

I am delighted to be here this afternoon and to take part in this very important gathering, which come in a transformative moment for global health. Indeed, this Summit is timely and topical.

It is timely because there are so many millions of people without voices who are suffering. People who we will never have the possibility to meet are expecting us to change the course of their lives.

It is topical because the subject is about saving lives. Saving lives is the most important indicator of a culture that cares for its most vulnerable. This Summit is a unique opportunity to show the world that saving the lives of women and girls needs visionary, courageous and optimistic action. This is the same kind of action that has transformed the lives of millions living and affected by AIDS.

In that regard, I want to thank President Bush for his personal commitment. Thank you also to Secretary Clinton for joining this important cause. It is clear from what I have heard this afternoon that the old approaches to saving lives are now obsolete. It is very important for us to rethink the way we do business.

The challenge is no longer how we can reach millions of people. Our challenge today is how to move from millions to billions. And that is a critical challenge. It means that we need to completely rethink innovation—our approach to technology. We need to democratize problem-solving. To make sure that people can own their own solutions.

Zero discrimination. Zero new HIV infections. Zero AIDS-related deaths.

For all of us, this means building new, simplified approaches in terms of making medicines, vaccines and diagnostics affordable to poor people.

It means changing completely the way we think about development, because the approach we are using today is not sustainable.

A profound turnaround

We have a unique opportunity to show the world that saving the lives of women and girls needs a new kind of vision, courage and opportunistic action. This is the same kind of action that President Bush and his administration took 10 years ago, when people were saying that medicines for HIV would never be available for poor countries. That it was not possible to do it.

I remember in 2001, when we were negotiating the UN Declaration, they were telling us not to include treatment for poor people. But Mr. President, you brought a new sense of urgency to the AIDS response. You helped us to focus on results. And 10 years later we have those results.

Today, almost 7 million people on treatment. In those days, none of the people living with HIV in Africa were on treatment. Today, 56 countries have managed to stabilize their epidemics and significantly reduce the number of new infections. We are seeing young people leading the prevention revolution. We are seeing science delivering new hope. And I want to thank Tony Fauci, who is in this room, for continuing to demonstrate to us that if we put people on treatment early, we can reduce new infections by up to 96%—which is amazing.

It has been a profound turnaround for this epidemic. And that would not have been possible without the personal vision of leaders like you.

Vision meets solidarity

In the time I have left, I want to acknowledge President Obama's decision to commit himself to build on the momentum we have today. We have been able to take the engine of PEPFAR out of emergency mode, creating a new drive to bring the world's attention to long-term sustainability and ownership.

I also want to thank this country's leaders for placing women and girls at the center of PEPFAR action. In country after country, we are seeing the results of this action. In partnership with PEPFAR, UNAIDS has helped 81 countries with gender-based HIV approaches.

To me, coming from Mali, this is a characteristic example of America's sustained and visionary leadership on AIDS. For more than a decade, AIDS has been high on the agenda across administrations. It is a bold illustration of what we can do and achieve when we are working together.

The world will remember this partnership, which has been built around global solidarity with people who are not in your country. The generosity of the American people will continue to resonate, not only in the lives of people you will see in this film, but in the millions you will never have a chance to meet.

Bridging HIV and cancer

The alliance between HIV and women's health has unlimited potential and will resonate across the world. This Pink Ribbon-Red Ribbon coalition will prevent much suffering and many deaths. The incidence of pre-cervical cancer is four to five times higher among HIV-infected women and girls. HIV care and treatment programmes are the ideal platform to integrate activities for the prevention of cervical cancer.

We can tap into new ways to maximize health systems and workforces. I am inspired by programmes that PEPFAR is funding in countries such as Tanzania and Zambia that piggyback on existing HIV programming to provide cancer screening for women and girls.

We have spent so much effort to keep millions of women and girls with HIV alive. Now we cannot afford to lose them to cervical cancer. I know that my friend Ambassador Brinker understands this. Nancy—as the architect behind this initiative, you are an inspiration to millions of women affected by cancer.

I look forward—with my mother, my wife and my daughters—to celebrating our joint victory over HIV and women's cancers within the decade.

Thank you.

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