

HIV: WHERE DEVELOPMENT MEETS HUMAN RIGHTS

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UN Human Rights Council**

SPEECH

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HIV – where development meets human rights

Mr President, your Excellencies, colleagues, it is so timely that we are meeting at this moment, when the Council is reflecting on 20 years of human rights achievements and challenges since Vienna, when the world is debating the post-2015 agenda, and when an AIDS-free generation is finally in sight.

I want to share what 30+ years of AIDS has taught us. The lessons of the AIDS response can lead us into the post-2015 era, shaping a new paradigm for development, one centred on and fuelled by human rights.

First, I want to thank the Human Rights Council for its tremendous contributions to the AIDS response. You have spoken out against HIV-related discrimination. You call for the right to health and for access to treatment. You call on governments to protect women from violence and inequality that also make them vulnerable to HIV. You stand up for the rights of the most marginalized, in rich and poor countries. You have supported an AIDS response that has always been about human rights. I ask you to please continue to do so.

Twenty years ago, we had little to offer people living with and vulnerable to HIV. There was no treatment and little funding for AIDS. There was widespread denial, instead of political commitment. And there were millions dying in silence and shame.

But the AIDS response has shown that when people stand up and demand their rights, denial and inaction are shattered.

It was people living with HIV, those affected, who turned everything around in this epidemic. They made the response to HIV and AIDS a responsibility for us all. They challenged us to recognize them as people with a human right to live in health – not as victims or criminals. Over the years, they have inspired and driven progress in the AIDS response. They have been true human rights defenders - fighting for their lives and for the lives of millions of others.

Today, we are halfway to halting and reversing this epidemic – the cup is half full, half empty. Countries are allocating more domestic funds to HIV; and donors have so far remained solid in their commitments. Scientific breakthroughs are coming fast. We have moved from no treatment access in 1996 to more than 8 million people on treatment as of the end of 2011, a 20-fold increase since 2003. We also now know that treatment equals prevention. People living with HIV who are on treatment are no longer infectious. The impact of treatment is enormous: since 2005, South Africa has achieved an unparalleled five-year increase in life expectancy. And we will see population-level HIV prevention benefits as treatment is increased.

But HIV continues to shine a harsh light on the inequalities of this world. It is outrageous that in 2013, when we have all the tools we need to beat this epidemic, 1.7 million people still die each

year, because they cannot access treatment. Only 28% of the children in need of treatment are receiving it. Babies are still born HIV infected in poor countries, but not in rich ones. AIDS is still the leading cause of death among young women across the globe. We still have to fight prejudice, discrimination, exclusion and criminalization – in homes, communities, hospitals, police stations and courtrooms. I ask you: do all humans share equally the rights to life, health, non-discrimination and security? Yes, they do.

The AIDS response has been and continues to be an instrument for attacking social injustice. It has led us to address inequalities between the rich and the poor. It has led us to address punitive approaches to and exclusion of the most marginalized – sex workers, people who use drugs, men who have sex with men and transgender people. They are our brothers, sisters, children, and friends. They too have human rights. There is much more work to be done to overcome inequality and exclusion; and it is human rights work that we must do to end this epidemic – to reach all those in need of HIV prevention, treatment, care and support.

The AIDS response has taught us that inclusion and participation gets development done. We have learned that we must learn from those affected, from those most at risk. We have learned that attention to the *process* is as important as to the *outcomes*. Even the most marginalized must be included and heard, even where this is very unpopular.

We have learned that people should no longer be subjects of development, but active agents of change, achieving social justice from within a society. This means civil society needs serious, on-going funding support, as well as the political space and freedom to act. It means that people should be supported to know their rights and mobilize around them. Human rights literacy is “demand creation.” Human rights drive development. Development without human rights leads to the kind of social explosions we have seen recently across the world.

AIDS has taught us that we must address critical linkages - those between health, injustice, inequality, poverty and conflict. AIDS has taught us that we must build accountability, to continue to rally governments, donors and the UN system to make time-limited, concrete commitments and to measure progress, or the lack thereof.

So the post-2015 development agenda has a lot to learn from AIDS. These lessons urge that the post-2015 development framework should explicitly embrace the human rights framework, as well a rights-based approach to development. Now is our moment to discard the notion of “discretionary development” and support the entitlement of all people to have their civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights realized.

Ending AIDS is a human rights legacy for us all.

We can halt and reverse AIDS if we maintain our momentum and commitments through and after 2015. To quote Mandela, “When the water starts boiling, it is foolish to turn off the heat.”

Our triumph against AIDS will inspire civil society, governments and development partners to tackle other complex 21st-century challenges that we share, through a participatory, inclusive and rights-based approach - the kind that works, that is sustainable.

Let us work with you, the foremost human rights leaders, to end AIDS and to take the lessons learned from AIDS into a post-2015 world where development equals the protection of health, dignity and security – through human rights.

Thank you.