

UNAIDS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SPEECH

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WORLD AIDS DAY COMMEMORATION



Your Excellency, Minister of Health,

Excellencies, Ministers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to be here with you today to celebrate together World AIDS Day 2020 in your great and beautiful country.

I would like to congratulate you for your personal leadership and I thank the Congolese government, our friends from civil society and partners who together enable your country to respond to the many challenges, particularly the fight against HIV, Ebola and now the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has much expertise and experience in pandemic management and the world can learn a lot from this country. Allow me to take this opportunity to congratulate you on the end of the 11th outbreak of the Ebola virus disease.

This World AIDS Day comes at a time of global crisis with COVID-19, which continues to have devastating socio-economic and health effects around the world, further deepening inequalities of all kinds.

I remain concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on the most vulnerable people and populations, including people living with HIV.

The COVID-19 pandemic is not only overwhelming health systems, but also the entire public, social and economic sectors. We already know that in many countries, HIV services have been slowed down or even interrupted, access to them has become more complicated, and supply chains for essential commodities are under strain.

I congratulate the communities, especially those affected by HIV, who have shown exceptional solidarity in the response to COVID.

Even before COVID-19, we knew that the global response to HIV was lagging behind and now it will be even harder to catch up.

We will not meet our targets for 2020. 38 million people are living with HIV. Over 12 million people are still waiting for access to treatment, 1.7 million people were newly infected with HIV and 690 000 people died of AIDS-related illnesses in 2019.

Here in the DRC, 520 000 people are living with HIV, 64.5% of whom are women and 68 000 children under the age of 15. Despite considerable progress, only 57% of people living with HIV are on ARV treatment.

Every week 4500 young women in sub-Saharan Africa are infected with HIV. This is unacceptable. We need to make a radical difference in the fight against HIV for adolescent girls and young women in sub-Saharan Africa, in all their diversity. In this decade of accelerated action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and in this year of the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, we must put girls' and women's rights, gender equality and access to sexual and reproductive health and rights at the centre.

We need to accelerate treatment for those who need it, strengthen prevention services and give special attention to adolescent girls, young women and key populations that are most vulnerable: gay men and other men who sex with men, people who inject drugs, prisoners, sex workers. This means we must remove barriers to care and prevention services and end stigma, discrimination and marginalization once and for all.

We are failing our children. Here in DRC, the vast majority of children living with HIV are not on treatment. To address this situation, we need targeted testing, better treatment and renewed engagement with families and communities.

We need to turn this global crisis into an opportunity to transform our world and put an end to COVID and HIV.

Our priority must be to strengthen the resilience and sustainability of national systems, including for health, HIV, education and social protection.

We need to find additional resources and allocate the necessary budgets so that countries can make the required investments in these areas.

54 low- and middle-income countries spent more on debt repayment than on health.

This is not acceptable!

The world's richest nations and other creditors must commit to debt cancellation and, at a minimum, extend debt relief measures until the end of 2022.

The world must not repeat the mistakes of the early years of the fight against HIV—when millions of people living in poor countries died waiting for access to treatment.

UNAIDS is proud to be part of the People's Vaccine Alliance, which calls for a vaccine to be distributed equitably, quickly and free of charge around the world, based on need—in other words, a vaccine for everyone. Medical and health technologies must be developed and produced as global public goods.

We know: to end AIDS, we must end inequalities.

We need to focus on people and end the social injustices that are the source of new infections, especially among young women and key populations.

Today is also an opportunity to rethink and build a better future. A future where health will no longer be a privilege, but a right for all of us. A future where we are once again on the right track to end the inequalities and injustices that continue to fuel the AIDS epidemic.

No country can end the HIV and COVID-19 pandemics on its own. On World AIDS Day, let us remember that such global challenges can only be addressed through global solidarity and shared responsibility.

We must therefore count on the commitment of all and particularly on the leadership of the national authorities and especially Heads of State, to ensure that the most vulnerable among us benefit from their right to justice and equity.

Thank you.



