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UNAIDS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REMARKS



CERVICAL CANCER AND HIV: ADDRESSING LINKAGES AND COMMON INEQUALITIES TO SAVE WOMEN'S LIVES

To both our brave sisters—Sally and Sasha, all other survivors of cervical cancer and those women fighting cervical cancer: UNAIDS and the HIV movement are by your side in both of these fights—to “make cervical cancer history” and to end the AIDS pandemic.

I would like to express my appreciation to First Lady Monica Geingos and thank her for her powerful intervention. She inspires us with all she is doing for the health of women and girls in Namibia.

In countries with high rates of HIV, over 50% of cervical cancer cases are reported among women living with HIV. Women living with HIV are 6 times more likely to develop cervical cancer and to develop it at younger age than those without HIV.

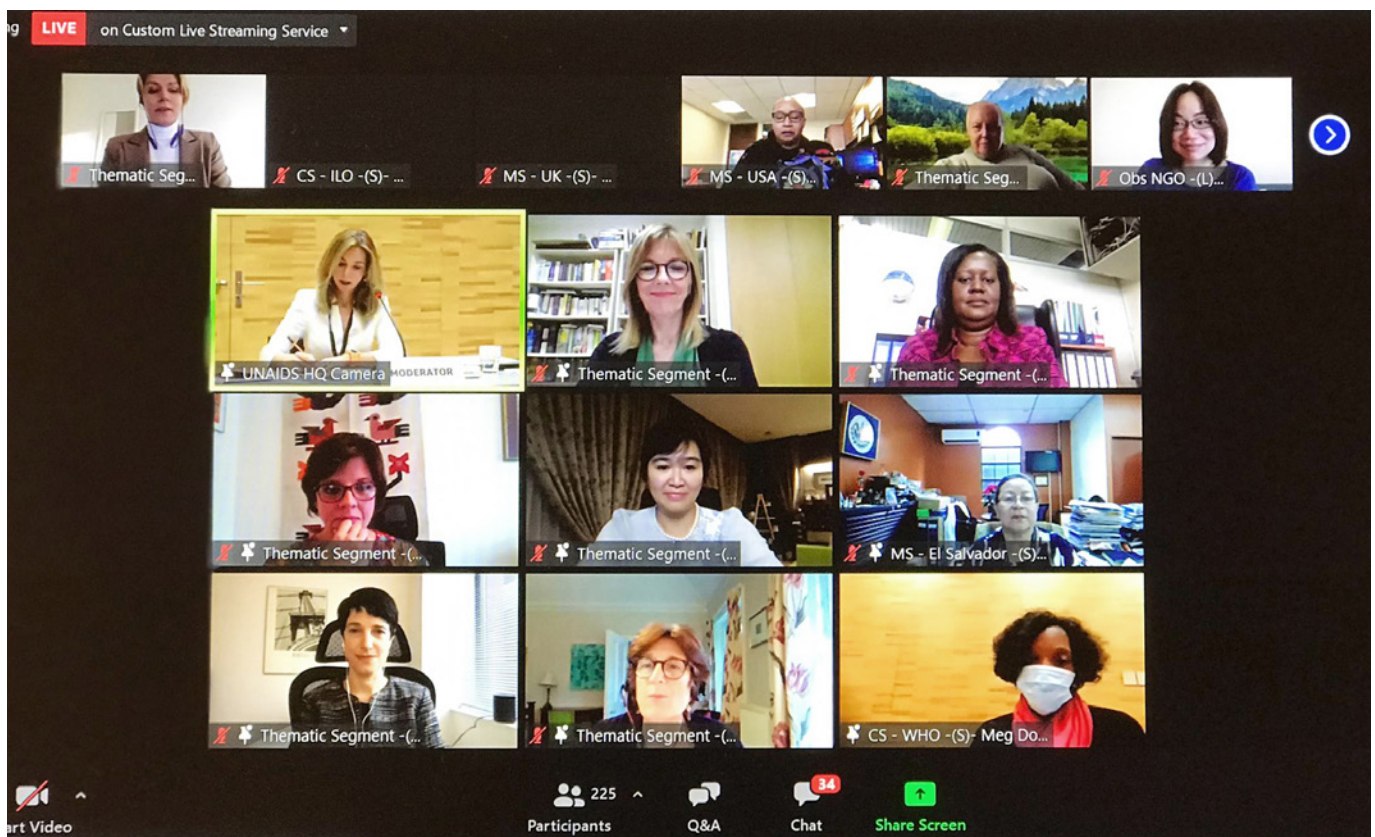
Our struggles against AIDS and cervical cancer are intertwined in one vital way: inequalities drive both.

Too often access to health care depends on where a person lives, who they are, and how much money they have in their pocket. The same is true for women who need screening and treatment for cervical cancer. Women and adolescent girls in poorer countries, including those living with HIV or at risk of HIV, have limited access to these life-saving cervical cancer services.

Earlier this year, we lost our cousin Mary Nareeba. Mary was my age, the mother of 8 children, she lived in a rural area and managed a small herd of cattle. Mary put her children, spouse and in-law's health first and hers last. To get the appointment for an operation at the hospital, Mary had to pay 3000 USD—our whole family helped. But by the time she went to hospital, she already had stage 4 cancer and there was nothing we could do to save her life.

No woman or adolescent girl should die from cervical cancer- it is preventable and it is curable. It is unacceptable that we save a woman's life by ensuring that she has access to antiretroviral therapy for HIV, yet she dies from cervical cancer. It is also unacceptable that in so many resource limited countries girls have such





limited access to HPV vaccines. Our focus should be on breaking down silos and building bridges between HIV and cervical cancer programmes. Creating these linkages will save lives.

We also need to tackle misinformation and prejudice about infection. In a survey in Eswatini for example, 63% of men and 58% of women agreed that women had to seek permission from the male partner to visit a health care centre. And 48% of respondents believed that only women with multiple partners get cervical cancer! There is nothing shameful about a woman's body. No woman should need "permission" from a man to leave her house or access health care.

We need to insist that research and treatment of medical conditions which affect women secure equal prioritisation and equal funding with those which affect men. Women and men must be involved in the planning and financial decision-making of all health services. In Malawi, for example, the poorest women living with HIV are 15 times less likely than the richest women living with HIV to be screened for cervical cancer. Internationally, 90% of girls in high-income countries have access to the HPV vaccine, yet in low- and middle-income countries just 10% have access. Women in Eastern and Southern Africa are 10 times as likely to die of cervical cancer compared with Western Europe or Australia. In many countries with the highest HIV and cervical cancer burden, women with invasive and late stages of cervical cancer have no access to radiotherapy, chemotherapy, or palliative care.

Investment must be dramatically stepped up, financial barriers fully removed, services organised not only for but with communities, and women and men treated as equals. Partnerships like *Go Further* show that when we come together rapid scaling up of cervical cancer screening and treatment integrated with HIV treatment can save millions of women's lives.

UNAIDS stands with all the women heroes, survivors of cervical cancer and women living with HIV. Together we will end the injustices and inequalities that fuel HIV and cervical cancer. Together we will make history.

Thank you.

