

# UNAIDS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REMARKS

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WORLD AIDS DAY COMMEMORATION, IMARISHA USAWA!



SIKU YA **UKIMWI** DUNIANI, 2022

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H.E. Samia Suluhu Hassan, President of the United Republic of Tanzania;  
H. E. Kassim Majaliwa, Prime Minister;  
Honorable Regional Commissioner for Mtwara;  
Your Excellency the Ambassador of the United States of America;  
Colleagues from the United Nations  
Chairperson of the National Council of PLHIV (NACOPHA)  
Executive Director of the Tanzania Commission for AIDS  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning:

At the outset, I'd like to recognize in a very special way Her Excellency President Suluhu Hassan and to say how honoured I am to join her and the people of Tanzania to mark World AIDS Day here in Lindi.

It's a moment to honour over 40 million people, who have lost their lives to AIDS, to take stock of where we are globally in fighting AIDS, and to commit to end the inequalities that continue to drive new infections and that continue to lead to AIDS-related deaths.

I am excited to be here on Tanzanian soil. This is the country that led all of us on the African continent to fight for our independence, and to gain it. This is the country that led us to throw out colonialism, the land of President Nyerere. I'm proud to be here.

Secondly, Tanzania is a leader in fighting AIDS. Over the past 12 years, Tanzania has been able to reduce new infections by almost 50% and to cut AIDS related deaths by 50%. This is remarkable progress. Many younger people don't even know what AIDS looks like, because Tanzania has made such remarkable progress with 86% of Tanzanians who live with HIV on treatment.

So I also want to thank, here in her presence, Doctor Samia Suluhu Hassan for her courage, her humility and her compassion as a leader. For focusing on and empowering communities at the grassroots and for promoting more women in leadership. Your President is a role model for all of us women in Africa. She's broken a barrier and I am sure I speak for all African women to say—we look up to her.

## Earlier this week, we released the new UNAIDS World AIDS Day report, "Dangerous Inequalities" in Dar es Salaam

I thank Minister George Simbachawene, for joining us at that launch.

In this report we say that we are not on track to end AIDS by 2030, as all our leaders from all over the world, promised at the United Nations.

Why?

Because of inequality.

But there is good news: if we reduce and end the inequalities, then we can end AIDS.

What are these inequalities?



## First: We have to equalize for girls and for women to reduce their higher risk to HIV.

Do you know that in our region here, sub-Saharan Africa, girls and women are three times more likely to be infected with HIV than boys and men of the same age? The driving factor behind this is inequality.

Here in Tanzania, for example, last year in 2021, of the 54 000 people infected, nearly 30% were young people. And of those young people—three quarters, 74% were girls or young women. So, we have a problem there. And we know the answer: education.

Education is a powerful equalizer and it can help us right this injustice.

If we let our girls stay in school to finish secondary, their risk of getting HIV can be reduced by up to 50%. If in the school we also teach them about their bodies, we call it sexuality education, how to protect themselves that risk can be reduced further.

That's why 13 countries of Africa have come together in the Education Plus initiative. They are supported by us at the UN to move an ambitious plan to put all school children in a classroom to complete secondary education, so that our girls stay in school. I am delighted that yesterday Tanzania joined this initiative!

But beyond this, beyond the education part, we have to bring services *together* for girls and women. Which services? Sexual and reproductive health services, services for preventing and addressing sexual and gender-based violence *and* services for preventing and treating HIV. Those three must come in one stop centres, so that a girl or a woman can get all of those together.

## Secondly: An inequality which breaks my heart, is the inequality against children, babies. With the science which we have today, no baby should be born with HIV and no child who has HIV should be without treatment.

But today, around the world we are leaving children behind. If you take Tanzania, you have 87% of adults living with HIV on treatment. But for children living with HIV it's only 60%. We have to correct this.

It's the same all over the world that we are leaving children behind. We know what to do. That's why the 12 countries with the highest burden have come together in the Global Alliance to end AIDS in Children. I want to tell you President that I was so proud and happy, because Tanzania, through your Minister of Health, was the first country to join this Alliance. It's possible. Botswana is almost getting there. So can Tanzania and the other members of the Alliance.

## Third: We have to equalize for marginalised groups.

There are people in society, who because of who they are, are at more risk of HIV. We have to open the way for them to get prevention and treatment. We

can't end AIDS unless we end it for everyone without discrimination. There are some laws that make people go underground. Run away from services. These laws, some of them came from colonisers, they were not our laws. It is time to remove them. So that everyone can come forward for life-saving services.

Recently Singapore, a former British colony, removed those laws. St. Kitts and Nevis, an island in the Caribbean, many are beginning to remove those laws. But we still have them, here, in Uganda, in Kenya, in other countries. We need to think about removing these laws.

But beyond the laws, we have to fight stigma, because also in society, we pass a sentence on these people. We push them away and they fear to come for help. But let me say, I grew up in a village in Uganda with many bars. My parents would say don't look there, but on Christmas Day, I would see these women who worked in the bars at night, here at the church singing with us. The bishop would not send them away. Now, if the bishops and the mullahs don't send people away from the church and the mosques, why should the government arrest them? I think government does the job of services, and then the priest, the mullah, do the job of giving us the faith. That's my point of view. But let us, we as citizens, not discriminate against our fellows. Let's encourage them to get services. Let's end stigma.

#### Fourth: we have to equalize for communities

The people at the grassroots. We must empower them and enable them to lead the services, because they know who needs them. They will reach the people, whom we don't see from far.

I saw this first-hand on Tuesday in Temeke in Dar es Salaam. I visited the Mukikute programme and I left there very hopeful. Mukikute gives dignity to people who have fallen into drug use and are addicted to drugs. People who have benefited from services at Mukikute in the past are now helping other people who are injecting drugs to live safely and in dignity. I visited a maskani. Maskani is a place where they come and those who have been treated go there as volunteers to help them, to bring them to the centre for treatment. So at this centre, I found they have somewhere to sleep, they've got water and soap, they can clean up and look good, and they have friends. And they can be put on treatment for TB and HIV. To me this is the story, the seed that was planted by your founding father, President Julius Nyerere, to build community, to empower people at the bottom, to care. I was so happy to see this and I praise you Tanzania for doing this.

#### So the fifth is to equalize access to medicines

Here I want to say, when the new medicines come out, when the newest treatments come, they don't come here. They start in the rich countries. Then people here continue to die as they make big profits.

Our argument is no. Two things: That technology should be shared, the medicine should come to those who need it right away. To not die while others make money in the bank. We also say Africa must make its own medicines. We cannot be where we were with COVID. So, President, I salute you and I ask you to speak with other leaders at your level to rush to get us to produce our own medicines.

## Lastly: To end AIDS we must tackle the inequality in resourcing.

COVID-19, the war in Ukraine, are increasing inequality and the problems arising from poverty. Let me tell you this President, because its important. Every day, rich countries in the North, they get 136 million dollars in debt repayments from our countries here, paying back the debt. 136 million dollars every single day. This money is more than four times what we spend on health, two times what we spend on education. I call this unjust. If you have a loan in the bank, and you fall sick and you don't work and you don't earn, you go to the bank and you get a postponement of your debt until you are better and you can pay. We should not be paying debt, interest on debt when we are not able to pay for the health of our people. We must come together and change that. The international community must find the financial mechanism to address debt.

But let me end: 1.5 million Tanzanians are on treatment today. This this would not have been possible without the strong leadership of the government of Tanzania and without the commitment and solidarity of friends of Tanzania like, PEPFAR, represented here by the Ambassador of the United States Donald Wright, the Global Fund and us in the United Nations.

We are going to stay together until we complete the job, and no child is born with HIV and everyone who is living with HIV is on treatment and leads a good life. And everyone has access to the services they need. We will equalize. This is how to end AIDS.

I thank you so much Your Excellency and people of Tanzania.

