



OPENING REMARKS

WINNIE BYANYIMA, UNAIDS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FRIDAY 29 JULY

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I would like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which we gather is the traditional and unceded territory of the Mohawk (Kanien'keha:ka) people, a place which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst nations.

We are grateful for the opportunity to meet on this territory and commit to the pursuit of truth, reconciliation, and allyship.

Protestors, thank you. Every advance in the struggle against AIDS has come through protest. I have heard you. Our respected Co-Chairs, Professor Jean-Pierre Routy and Professor Adeeba Kamarulzaman—thank you for hosting us.

Today, we face an extraordinary opportunity. We now have the tools to end the AIDS crisis in a matter of years—if world leaders act with courage and vision.

I ask world leaders to picture, just as the thousands of people in this hall do, a world in which, through delivering justice and dignity, we have ended AIDS.

A world where every girl in every country, finishes secondary school. A world where everyone has quality health care—where everyone living with HIV has access to the best treatment science can offer. A world that has rejected stigma and repealed all discriminatory and punitive laws; where everyone—from LGBTQ people, to people in prisons, to people who use drugs—enjoys their full human rights, is accepted, respected, included.

A world in which people from the Global South are not denied entry into wealthy countries to bring their expertise on a global pandemic.

I ask world leaders to hold this same vision in their minds as we do in ours—and to take the bold and necessary steps to get us there. Today, we are a long way from that vision.

Progress in preventing new HIV infections is faltering. Every two minutes an adolescent girl or young woman is infected with HIV—every two minutes. Too many times from a sexual act that is forced upon her.

*“Social progress...
comes through
the tireless efforts
and the persistent
work of dedicated
individuals.”*

Dr Martin Luther King, Jr

Progress on treatment is also off track. It is an outrage that only half of all children with HIV have access to treatment. Where I grew up, all children are *our* children. So we are letting down our children.

650 000 people died of AIDS-related causes last year—that is one precious life every minute. On the current trajectory, millions more will die this decade.

They are dying not because life-saving treatments don't exist. They're there.

They are dying because inequalities and greed are snatching these medicines out of their hands.

But until everyone has access to the best that science has to offer, until everyone has their full human rights, we will never end this or any future pandemic. Never.

Dr Martin Luther King, Jr said: “Social progress ... comes through the tireless efforts and the persistent work of dedicated individuals.”

Thanks to your tireless efforts and persistent work; thanks to partnerships between civil society, scientists, and governments—and I am sad the government of Canada isn't here, because Canada is a great partner—thanks to support by the Global Fund, PEPFAR, and international donors, amongst them, Canada, against all the odds, we are making progress. It is our privilege as UNAIDS to work to bring all of our efforts together as coordinators.

We can bend the arc of the HIV world toward justice. Together we can—we will—end AIDS. I remain hopeful.

Thank you very much.