



Speech

[CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY]

**Speech at the 4th General Assembly of the Organization of
African First Ladies against HIV/AIDS**

24 January 2006

Khartoum, Sudan

**Deborah Landey
UNAIDS Deputy Executive Director**

Her Excellency, first lady of Sudan, Mrs Widad Babiker Omer

Her Excellency, the first lady of Zambia, Mrs Maureen Mwanawasa, acting president of the Organization of African First Ladies against HIV/AIDS,

Their Excellencies, the first ladies of Africa,

HE, Minister of Health of the Sudan, Dr Thokaya,

Distinguished panellists,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Asalamalekum,

It is a tremendous honour to be here with you this evening at the OAFLA General Assembly. I bring you the warm greetings of Dr. Peter Piot, Executive Director of UNAIDS.

This extraordinary organization of First Ladies of Africa is a landmark in the world's efforts to turn the tide on AIDS and I salute the visionary leadership, commitment and personal courage shown by each of you. We in the United Nations family are proud to support you.

We owe thanks to you, the First Lady of Sudan for hosting this meeting and commend you for your leadership in the fight against AIDS. I also thank you, Madame First Lady, for bringing me back to Sudan after 20 years of absence. On reaching Khartoum yesterday, all my cherished memories came flooding back of the warmth and kindness that I experienced here when I visited the Sudan in the mid-1980s. So I am delighted to be here.

Distinguished delegates and friends,

Today's Assembly comes at a turning point in the world's response to the AIDS crisis, a crisis that is one of the greatest threats and challenges of our times.

A turning point because although more people are living with HIV than ever before, there are clear signs that the response to AIDS has gathered real momentum.

There is a momentum of leadership. In about 40 developing countries, heads of state or government or their deputies lead the national councils for AIDS. I know that many of these countries are represented here today by you. And AIDS is a basic issue in the most important forums, whether it be summits of the African Union or the G8 countries or sessions of the UN Security Council and General Assembly. The organisation of African First Ladies is an example of this momentum of leadership. Your own personal leadership on AIDS in Sudan, Madame First Lady, is exemplary.

There is also a momentum of money – a decade ago, low and middle income countries had just \$300 million to tackle this crisis, but in 2005, over \$8 billion was spent by developing countries, about one third of it from their own resources.

There is a momentum of hope, because by mid-2005 the number of Africans with access to antiretroviral treatment had risen to half a million, enabling them to return to work and to live normal, productive lives.

And most striking, there is a momentum of results. More and more countries are making headway against their epidemics. In other words, HIV prevention efforts are working! Last year, we were heartened to see that HIV levels among adults had fallen sharply in two more countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Kenya and Zimbabwe. And there is encouraging data and news coming in from several other countries. The multisectoral AIDS response in Sudan – where religious leaders, schools, members of the uniformed services, displaced persons and their hosting communities, people living with HIV and women organizations etc are involved – is a model for others to follow.

So all in all, today we have absolute proof that AIDS is a problem with a solution! We have proof that it is realistic to hope and to fight to ensure that new generations are free of AIDS!

This proof is a call to redouble our efforts, to do even more than we have done so far, because for the first time ever we have an opportunity to reverse this epidemic. Certainly, it will not be easy – but I am confident that we can succeed.

OAFLA's efforts – your efforts! – will be critical to Africa's continuing success in this new era. Because through your leadership you are addressing critical aspects of AIDS – the epidemic's impact on women and on children and young people. As we all know too well, AIDS is now an epidemic of women and young people. In sub-Saharan Africa, nearly 60% of people living with HIV are women. Globally more than half of all new infections are among young people ages 15-24.

Your role in confronting the epidemic's toll on women is so critical because you are the most powerful role models for women and the most powerful advocates for empowering them. You demonstrate, better than anyone, that women are resilient leaders. Your campaign says it all – “Be an Example!” And you are the most knowledgeable advocates for greater action to address the many obstacles women and girls face when it comes to benefiting from HIV prevention, treatment, and care services. Your voice and efforts can do more than anyone else's to empower Africa's women and your people to protect themselves from AIDS.

And with your campaign – “Treat Every Child As Your Own” – we can realistically hope to reach the point where every child and young person in Africa is protected from AIDS – so that HIV infections become increasingly rare and so that each new generation is free of HIV.

Distinguished delegates, friends,

We in the UN family share your belief in the force of women's leadership. We share your faith in women's innate capacity and strength, as well as their unique position within their families and societies. This is also why we launched the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS – a worldwide alliance to make the AIDS response work better for women and children. Within that alliance are a number of prominent women from all over the world who like you, campaign tirelessly, shining a bright light on issues related to women, girls and AIDS, stimulating concrete, effective action to strengthen the ability of women and children to protect themselves from HIV.

The challenge for all of us today is to seize the new momentum of action on AIDS and to make sure that it results in maximum benefit for the people of Africa. We must set our sights on getting as close to universal access to HIV prevention, treatment,

care and support by the year 2010 – as a mid-point to achieving the Millennium Development Goal of reversing AIDS by 2015.

We know that your leadership of the response against AIDS is the best guarantee that all of Africa's women, young people and children will be protected against AIDS, that Africa will soon have HIV-free new generations. We in the UN Family have an abiding commitment to you the first ladies of Africa and the people of this great continent of Africa.

Thank you very much