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## **High-Level Session on the fight against AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria in the Middle East and North Africa Region**

**Organized by the Ministry of Health of the Kingdom of  
Morocco, and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis  
and Malaria**

**Held under the High Patronage of His Majesty King  
Mohammed VI**

**Marrakech, Morocco  
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**Speech by  
Dr Peter Piot,  
Executive Director, UNAIDS**

Excellencies, distinguished Ministers, delegates, dear friends,

It is a great pleasure for me to participate in this meeting here in Marrakech.

As you know, AIDS is one of the priorities of the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr Kofi Annan, who has asked me to transmit to you his personal message:

*"I send my best wishes to all those participating in this High-Level Session with Health Ministers to coincide with the Twelfth Board Meeting of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria. Let convey my special appreciation to the Government of Morocco for hosting the session.*

*An effective response to the global AIDS epidemic is a personal priority for me. I am therefore happy to have this opportunity to reiterate my support for the Global Fund, which plays a crucial role in mobilizing resources for the response.*

*This session takes place in a region of growing importance in the fight against the epidemic. According to the latest AIDS epidemiological update produced by UNAIDS and WHO last month, there will have been 67,000 new infections in the Middle East and North Africa this year. I hope you will grasp the opportunity afforded by this High-Level Session to marshal the political commitment needed to tackle this challenge, and, in particular, to confront the stigma, denial and discrimination that helps fuel the spread of HIV. We know that in the world of AIDS, silence is death.*

*Your meeting will highlight the need for donors to further extend their financial support to national programmes, and to enhance cooperation and coordination within the region. At the World Summit in September, all Member States of the United Nations pledged to implement a package for HIV prevention, treatment and care, with the aim of coming as close as possible to universal access by 2010. Crucial to this scaling up will be efforts to ensure greater financial predictability in the coming years. The countries of the Middle East and North Africa have an unprecedented opportunity to help the international community in guaranteeing the long-term security and predictability of resource flows for the global AIDS response, including through mechanisms such as the Global Fund. I call on the region's Governments not only to review their domestic budgets devoted to AIDS, TB and malaria, but also to assess how their overseas development assistance can be mobilized to meet the global challenge posed by AIDS and other development issues.*

*Building greater sustainability in funding the response to HIV/AIDS must be an important goal for us all. The UN family and I remain fully committed to working with the Global Fund towards that end. Let us spare no effort in our work to accelerate the delivery of life-saving programmes to the people who need them most."*

On my part, I would like to express my warmest thanks to the Kingdom of Morocco, our host country, and to the Global Fund for organizing this meeting.

I am very encouraged to see so many countries from the region represented here. This is a unique opportunity to share our experiences and reaffirm our collective commitment and mobilization for the Region.

### **Leadership and progress in Morocco – an example to follow**

I have had an opportunity over the last few days to appreciate the exceptional commitment and the progress made by Morocco in its response to HIV/AIDS.

The personal leadership of His Majesty King Mohammed VI has brought an exceptional

dimension and has made a real difference in the fight against AIDS – an example for the Region to follow.

Even if the prevalence of HIV is still rather low, and we hope it remains that way, Morocco has developed very good prevention and outreach programs and targeted interventions for the most vulnerable populations.

Access to treatment is about to become universal. It is of good quality and free of charge for the patients, co-financed in equal parts between the Government and the Global Fund.

I have rarely seen such good collaboration among all the different national partners, the Government (including Ministries of Health, Education, of Habous and Islamic Affairs, of Youth and Justice) civil society and international partners, including the UN System and the Global Fund, all working together around a clear strategic plan.

The SIDACTION evening last Friday, which was transmitted on national television channels - and in which I had the honour to participate, together with Prof. Michel Kazatchkine the Vice-Chair of the Global Fund Board - was a real success, not only in terms of mobilizing financial support but also in terms of informing and sensitizing the broad public to AIDS and combating stigmatization. This is certainly the kind of initiative to undertake again and support in other countries as well. This action also shows that in this Region there is a real mobilization by the people to support the fight against AIDS.

### **Challenges and opportunities for the Region**

I also know that there are other positive experiences in the Region with prevention programs as well as in treatment and support for people living with HIV that we will hear about today.

For the first time, in November of this year, people living with HIV from fifteen countries of the Middle East and North Africa met in Algiers with representatives of national AIDS programs, civil society organizations, UNAIDS and international partners. This important event is, in my view, a crucial milestone in the AIDS response in the Region. The Algiers Declaration that was adopted at this meeting highlights the joint commitment of all participants to recognize people living with HIV as the key actors in national responses to AIDS.

Except for Sudan and Djibouti, the Region has still relatively low prevalence of HIV and has to face a number of other development and public health challenges.

Nonetheless, the Region has an opportunity to act now, before the AIDS epidemic escalates. This implies, above all, a clear political commitment to put in place solid HIV prevention programs for the most vulnerable populations. The diverse factors of vulnerability present in the Region include population mobility, poverty, political instability, and economic and social change within societies with large numbers of young people and where stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV and marginalized populations is still very present.

These aspects of vulnerability that are linked to individual behaviours are not always easy to address in this region, as in many others, but we must find ways to address them and find appropriate solutions that are adapted to the local context. The health sector is and has to remain the driving force of the response to the epidemic but the other sectors also have an important contribution to make.

### **Challenges and opportunities for the Global Fund**

The Global Fund has made it possible to scale up the response to AIDS in some countries of the Region, by providing significant financial resources that allowed a substantive increase of coverage in the provision of services.

For the Global Fund, Morocco is undoubtedly one of the best examples of the unique added

value that the Fund can bring to the national responses.

In Morocco, one of the keys to success has been the true partnership, including a financial partnership, among all national and international partners. This has also been a key factor for ensuring the sustainability of the response over the longer term under the overall guidance of the National Authority. Clearly, the term "recipient country" is not acceptable - and Morocco is an excellent example. We should be talking instead of "partner countries" and I hope that the Global Fund will adopt this terminology as of this week. Furthermore, this partnership is the best approach for the work of the Fund in middle-income countries.

Performance and the achievement of results is one of the fundamental principles of the Fund with which we all agree. The challenge is to ensure that the operations of the Fund are truly based on the needs and realities of countries. The performance analysis must take into consideration the national context, especially in terms of institutional capacities, management and human resources.

Wherever I travel, I see that national coordination remains a challenge and we owe it to ourselves to find the best modalities to ensure that the mechanisms of the Fund at the country level (e.g. Country Coordination Mechanisms CCMs, local fund agents LFAs) truly contribute towards strengthening national coordination and supporting the implementation of nationally defined priorities and programs.

This is even more important as we make progress and redouble our efforts towards achieving universal access to services, both in terms of prevention and care and treatment. We need to begin to plan for the long term response, ensuring the overall sustainability of resources and services.

I would like to reiterate the support of the United Nations System, and particularly UNAIDS, in order to help countries address the challenges linked to the implementation and scaling up of programs. And here I would like to thank Dr Gezairy for the excellent collaboration UNAIDS has had with WHO in the Region.

It is my hope that, by mid 2006, during the Special Session of the UN General Assembly on AIDS, we will have the opportunity to demonstrate ever more progress achieved in the Region in the responses to the epidemic.

May this week be productive for all and help reinforce our global partnership against AIDS.

Thank you very much.