

MESSAGE ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD AIDS DAY

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On this 18th World AIDS Day, the world faces a choice in the global response to AIDS. We can either continue to accept that global efforts will fail to keep pace with ever increasing numbers of HIV infections and AIDS related deaths, including more and more women and girls.

Or we can recognize the exceptional global threat posed by AIDS and embrace an equally exceptional response.

The latest global AIDS figures show some signs of hope: Adult infection rates have decreased in a few countries, notably in Kenya, Zimbabwe and some Caribbean countries including Bahamas, Barbados, Bermuda, Dominican Republic and Haiti, and that changes in behaviour, such as increased use of condoms, delay of first sexual experience and fewer sexual partners – have played a key part in these declines. However, globally, the epidemic continues to grow: The number of people living with HIV in 2005 has reached its highest level ever, at an estimated 40.3 million people, nearly half of them women.

The lessons of nearly 25 years into the AIDS epidemic are clear. Investments made in HIV prevention break the cycle of new infections. Investments made in HIV treatment and care give people longer, better and more productive lives. By making these investments, each and every country can reverse the spread of AIDS.

The World Summit in New York last September, all UN Member States pledged to developing and implementing a package for HIV prevention, treatment and care with the aim of coming as close as possible to the goal of universal access to treatment by 2010 for all those who need it. Effective comprehensive prevention treatment and care programmes need to be scaled up on a massive scale so that everyone who needs them can benefit from them.

Yet, our efforts have to go even further if future generations are to live without AIDS. With a crisis as unprecedented as AIDS, we cannot afford to neglect any vital front. We must do whatever it takes to accelerate the pace of development of women-controlled prevention technologies, new generations of effective treatments, and a vaccine against HIV. And we must address the deeper-rooted factors that are driving the virus, including gender and income inequality.

The World AIDS Campaign has chosen “Stop AIDS, Keep the Promise” as its new theme, referring to the promises that we have all made to deliver the exceptional response demanded by AIDS. The commitment to resource and deliver effective prevention, treatment and care services for all who need them, is one we must all keep. There are no excuses.

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