

Press release

The impact of HIV in Central America: The United Nations Report

Managua, 8 November 2007—United Nations agencies and programs are committed to taking all the necessary measures to intensify Central America's response to the HIV epidemic. This announcement was made by the Regional Directors for Latin America and the Caribbean of UNAIDS and UNICEF, participating in the 5th Central American Congress on HIV – CONCASIDA 2007.

The regional directors emphasized their commitment to increasing action towards achieving the goal of universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support as established at the High Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS at the United Nations in New York, June 2006.

Universal access goes beyond the mere provision of antiretroviral treatment and includes a wide range of services such as counselling, clinical care and nursing focused on decreasing the impact of the virus. This also includes medicine against opportunistic diseases, adequate nutrition, psychological, social, and legal assistance and guaranteed care for orphans and the widowed.

UNAIDS' Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, Dr César Núñez, emphasized the importance of greater political commitment from national governments and an increase in resources and preventive and promotional materials. He affirmed that in doing so, Central America would be better positioned to make important advancements in achieving universal access to HIV prevention and treatment.

UNICEF's Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, Nils Kastberg, emphasized that in the region nearly 75% of adults have access to antiretroviral treatment – but for children, access doesn't even reach 35%. Therefore it is key to assist governments in taking urgent decisions to improve access to care, support and treatment for all children and youth living with HIV, just as it is to guarantee access to information and HIV prevention for all adolescents. It is fundamental for UNICEF to increase the availability of all-encompassing services that prevent transmission of HIV from mothers to their children. "We want all youth to have the right to be born healthy and free from the risk of contracting HIV," he said.

The conference was presided by the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Nicaragua, Alfredo Missair, who underlined the importance of the work of United Nations agencies in the response to HIV in Central America. Their contribution to the success of CONCASIDA 2007 has been outstanding having registered more than 4,000 people including members of civil society, people living with HIV, academic institutions, governments, international agencies and multilateral organizations.

The Regional Directors of the United Nations recognized the importance of working together at all levels to respond to HIV, by calling on nations to take the responsibility to protect the human rights of people living with HIV. They also underlined the need to overcome the barriers to universal access and the prevention of HIV by providing special care to people most vulnerable to HIV infection including women, children, men who have sex with men, sex workers, youth and displaced groups.

Although Central America has gone to great efforts in helping countries to achieve the goal of universal access, the HIV epidemic continues to spread, representing a threat without

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precedent to the progress and stability of the region. Central America is the sub-region most affected by HIV after the Caribbean in Latin America, having four of the top six Latin American countries with the highest rates of infection by HIV. AIDS is among the top ten causes of death in three of the six countries of Central America.

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UNAIDS is an innovative joint venture of the United Nations, bringing together the efforts and resources of the UNAIDS Secretariat and ten UN system organizations in the AIDS response. The Secretariat headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland—with staff on the ground in more than 80 countries. Coherent action on AIDS by the UN system is coordinated in countries through UN theme groups, and joint programmes on AIDS. UNAIDS' Cosponsors include UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank. Visit the UNAIDS Web site at www.unaids.org