



THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
--
MESSAGE ON WORLD AIDS DAY
1 December 2007

The theme of this World AIDS Day is leadership. Without it, we will never get ahead of the epidemic.

AIDS is a disease unlike any other. It is a social issue, a human rights issue, an economic issue. It targets young adults just as they should be contributing to economic development, intellectual growth, and bringing up young children. It is taking a disproportionate toll on women. It has made millions of children orphans. It does to society what HIV does to the human body -- reduces resilience and weakens capacity, hampers development and threatens stability.

This does not need to happen. We have the means to prevent young adults from becoming infected. We have the means to treat those who are infected. We have the means to provide care and support.

We have made tangible and remarkable progress on all these fronts. But we must do more. Although new data shows that global HIV prevalence has levelled off, the numbers are still staggering. It is our crucial mission to ensure that everyone can access HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. This includes migrants, sex workers, injecting drug users, and men who have sex with men. It includes people who work in Government, banks, legal offices, schools, and international organizations. It includes all people -- wherever they live, whatever they do.

Overcoming stigma remains one of our biggest challenges. It is still the single biggest barrier to public action on AIDS. It is one of the reasons why the epidemic continues to wreak its devastation around the world

Today, I call for renewed leadership in eradicating stigma associated with HIV. I applaud the brave individuals who live openly with HIV, who advocate tirelessly for the rights of the HIV-positive, who educate others about AIDS. I call for leadership among Governments in fully understanding the epidemic, so that resources go where they are most needed. And I call for leadership at all levels to step up the work to scale up towards universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010 -- as pledged by all Governments last year. We have only two years left until that target date. We need to show leadership now.

As Secretary General, I am determined to lead the United Nations family in this endeavour -- to ensure that we prioritize action on AIDS, to encourage Member States to keep the issue high on national and international agendas, and to work to make the UN a model of how the workplace should respond to AIDS.

Whatever our role in life, wherever we may live, in some way or another, we all live with HIV. We are all affected by it. We all need to take responsibility for the response. On this World AIDS Day, let us show the leadership required to live up to that responsibility.