

UNITED NATIONS



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United Nations Country Team for Somalia

**Somalis Uniting in Response to HIV and AIDS**

**Nairobi (1 December 2006)** – Significant progress is being made among Somali communities in the response to HIV and AIDS, the United Nations said today, World AIDS Day. The threat of HIV and AIDS has galvanized a united front against the disease with administrations and civil society - including religious leaders - building partnerships across regions and countries to avert a major epidemic.

“This is perhaps one of the few good news stories about Somali cooperation,” said UNDP Somalia Country Director and chair of the UN theme group on HIV and AIDS, Mr Bruno Lemarquis. “There is a clear recognition that HIV and AIDS respect no boundaries or politics. This approach has allowed everyone to focus on what really needs to be done to address the issue to the benefit of the people. The commitment and action from the leadership and the civil society is highly commendable and should be replicated. We must now build on this foundation and remain vigilant to reverse the infection level.”

Political commitment through the establishment and local support of the AIDS Commissions and Secretariats in Somaliland, Puntland and south central Somalia, has created the basis for all Somalis to coordinate their efforts on HIV and AIDS. Due to a long history of movement across borders in the Horn of Africa, steps have also been taken towards regional partnerships to address HIV vulnerability and cross-border mobility in the countries within the wider region. Somalis already have one agreed strategic framework and are working on one integrated prevention, treatment, care and support plan, and one monitoring and evaluation framework through shared technical management, coordination and information exchanges.

This coordinated approach has also led to an agreed set of targets towards Universal Access to prevention, treatment, care and support for all Somalis who need it by 2010.

UNAIDS Country Coordinator for Somalia, Mr Leo Kenny said: “These are ambitious targets and they have been developed, with the help of international partners, by Somalis for Somalis and that is where the true value of the process lies. Everyone will have to be involved – political and religious leaders, business people, the international community, different civil society groups, especially networks of people living with HIV, young people and women’s groups. Even then, success in achieving these targets and in reversing the infection rate will depend solidly on addressing issues of stigma and discrimination, and ensuring open discourse.”

In support of the Universal Access initiative, actors in the HIV and AIDS response are scaling up activities particularly targeting vulnerable and at-risk populations including children. Voluntary HIV counselling and testing (VCT) services, anti-retroviral therapy (ART) and prevention of mother to child transmission sites have been increased in the different regions.

UNICEF representative Mr Christian Balslev-Olesen emphasises the need for more focused interventions for children and adolescents. “There is a commonly-held belief that AIDS is mainly a problem for adults, not something that affects children and adolescents. Too often it is overlooked that HIV and AIDS has a child’s face. ‘Unite for Children. Unite against AIDS’ places children at the centre of the Somali Universal Access agenda. Young people need to have access to HIV prevention information, skills and services to protect themselves while at the same time knowing how to care for those who are already infected or affected.”

So far the Global Fund for AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM) has committed US\$ 25 million over five years to the Somali response.

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