

### **UNAIDS WELCOMES WOMEN HEALTH MINISTERS' INITIATIVE TO ADDRESS GENDER INEQUALITY**

**Geneva, 18 May 2004** – The Joint United Nations Programme (UNAIDS) welcomes the decision taken by women health ministers today to form an international network to address the growing inequalities women face in accessing basic health services, including HIV care and prevention services.

Women are particularly vulnerable to HIV because of inadequate knowledge about AIDS, insufficient access to sexual and reproductive health and educational services, inability to negotiate safer sex due to gender discrimination and imbalances of power, and lack of female-controlled HIV prevention methods, such as the female condom and microbicides.

“To fight AIDS effectively, we have to understand the reality of women’s lives,” said Dr Peter Piot, UNAIDS Executive Director. “The newly-formed network of women health ministers will act as a catalyst for ensuring that women and girls have access to basic health care, including urgently-needed HIV care and prevention services.”