

## Statement of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on World AIDS Day 2006

1 December 2006

Keep the promise. This year as we mark World AIDS Day, our focus is on accountability. Accountability for obligations undertaken and commitments made is one of the most powerful means we have for achieving progress on any agenda. Our local, national, regional and international responses to HIV are all located within an expanding set of political commitments and legal obligations, including national and international human rights obligations. Many, however, see too many commitments, too little action. It is time to deliver.

Accountability is one of the defining features of a response to the epidemic that is grounded in human rights. Marking progress and highlighting delinquency helps all of us monitor our achievements and learn our lessons. Legal accountability is one small, but important part of the picture. Indeed, it has been the issue of access to HIV treatment that has trail-blazed much of the national jurisprudence on litigating economic and social rights, including landmark cases in Africa, Latin America and Europe.

Human rights obligations underpin Member States' specific commitment to pursue the goal of universal access to comprehensive prevention programmes, treatment, care and support by 2010. Universal access is itself demanded by international human rights relating to health, particularly the right to the highest attainable standard of health. Ensuring accountability on the road towards universal access involves a number of things. It means monitoring governments' steps aimed at progressive realization of these rights and highlighting any failure to do so. It means holding governments accountable for obligations of immediate effect, for example where scaling-up access discriminates against a certain group such as children, those involved in the sale of sexual services, or injection drug users. Above all, it involves providing the framework, mechanisms and environment for holding officials accountable,

including ensuring freedom of speech, accessible justice, transparent government (including transparent budget processes), the ability of civil society to organize and the safety of activists to hold their governments to account. At the international level, the human rights treaty bodies and the special procedures of the Human Rights Council each provide a valuable means for monitoring respect for international human rights obligations in moving towards universal access.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights calls upon "every organ of society" to promote and secure the recognition and observance of human rights. The HIV epidemic underscores the urgency of heeding this call - as governments, civil society, private sector, UN system, and individuals - acting as a diverse but unified force, and ensuring our accountability for processes and results. On this World AIDS Day, and particularly in the context of universal access, let us all live up to our obligations and keep our promise.