



**Statement by the Estonian Minister of Social Affairs,
Mr. Hanno PEVKUR,
at the High-level meeting on HIV/AIDS**

at the United Nations Headquarters

New York

9 June 2011

Mr. President,

First I would like to associate myself with the statement that will be made on behalf of the European Union, and would hereby like to offer the following comments on behalf of Estonia.

Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The world has known the significance of three letters, H-I-V, already for thirty years. We have witnessed how the response to these three letters has changed over the years – from fear and neglect to care, acceptance and commitment to stop the spread of the virus.

However, as the Secretary General's report shows, the epidemic expands faster than we are able to combat it. HIV causes increasing humanitarian and economic burden on all countries in the world.

Estonia is a country with relatively high rate of HIV infection. By now 7850 people have been diagnosed with HIV – it is 0,6 per cent of the population. Although the number of new cases has been decreasing in the past ten years, there were 236 new cases per one million inhabitants diagnosed last year. Our main risk group is, and has been, injecting drug users. Access to drug abuse treatment and rehabilitation, harm reduction and sexual health services is essential in order to prevent further transmission of HIV among people who inject drugs, their sexual partners and to the general population.

Furthermore, one of the main conclusions of the European Region HIV conference held in Tallinn in May 2011 was that scaling up harm reduction and substitution treatment among people who inject drugs is one of the keys in stopping the epidemic in Eastern Europe - which is the fastest growing in the whole world.

Recent years have shown the increase of young women being infected through heterosexual contacts. Therefore, as HIV affects mostly people in productive and reproductive health, it should continue to be a high-level priority. Ensuring maternal, newborn and child health and preventing vertical transmission is our common goal that **must be** achievable. Estonia believes firmly that elimination of stigma and

discrimination, protection of sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls, including those living with HIV/AIDS, is a cornerstone of healthier societies.

Strong political commitment is absolutely needed in order to stop the spread of the virus and provide best care for those who are infected. Estonia has compiled a broad based strategy to achieve a sustainable reduction in the spread of HIV with clear national targets to be achieved by 2015. The strategy, which is fully in line with the commitments of the 2001 UN Declaration, unites the efforts of the governmental, municipal and non-governmental sector in order to take effective actions.

Historically our HIV and tuberculosis programs have been vertical. But it is clear that sustainable health systems and ensuring continuum of care for those affected by HIV are inevitable. It is very important that our patients, also those from vulnerable groups receive integrated services and comprehensive package of prevention, treatment and care. HIV is not just a problem for one institution or organization but an effective response requires collaboration of stakeholders and specialists from different fields and levels.

Dedicated intersectoral cooperation allows us to report outstanding results today. We see the decline in the number of new infections. This ensures us that we are on the right path and we are committed to continue our activities, the compact response on all levels to stop the spread of the virus and provide quality care for all those who are infected.

Respected colleagues,

We have gathered here from across the globe to express our support to recommendations set by Secretary-General in his report. I believe that we all aim to fulfill these to the highest possible standards for the health of our nations and the whole humanity. In order to achieve that, we need to work together, share our experiences and learn from each other.