



General Assembly

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High-level meeting on HIV/AIDS

H.E. Mr. Erik Solheim

Minister of the Environment and International Development

President,

Much has changed in the 30 years of AIDS. We need to use this anniversary to recommit and refocus our work. We have to ensure that results that we have achieved are not lost and at the same time make further progress. There is no room for complacency. HIV is more than health. It is a security issue, as illustrated by the discussion in the Security Council two days ago. HIV is further a rights issue, as illustrated in the discussion on the right to health in the Human Rights Council last week.

Our experience is that the approaches that work well on HIV, are those based on rights and on promoting the dignity of people. Important partners in the response are persons living with HIV and key populations such as men who have sex with men, trans-persons, drug users, prisoners and sex workers. The same applies for other key target groups who need tailored interventions. Since we last met in 2008, there has been a very positive development concerning the elimination of HIV-related restrictions on entry, stay and residence. We would like to congratulate the countries that have removed such restrictions since 2010; US, China, Namibia and Ukraine. We encourage other countries that still have such restrictions to remove them as soon as possible, as such restrictions discriminate HIV/AIDS-positive.

Remarkable results have been achieved during the three decades with HIV. Entering the fourth decade, transforming our work is crucial. In the next phase of the HIV response, we must take AIDS out of isolation, and take an integrated approach. Connecting the HIV response with the UN Secretary-General's Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health, is a golden opportunity. HIV and AIDS programmes should be mainstreamed into national health systems.

(Check against delivery)

The linkages to sexual and reproductive health programmes are particularly important. An integrated approach to AIDS and TB is vital. A precondition for this is that well-functioning health systems are put in place, and that in the meantime other solutions are found so that testing, treatment and follow-up are safeguarded. For this to be achieved we need strong political leadership at all levels, but in particular at national level. The HIV response is a shared responsibility of the world community, starting at the national level.

Social, political and economic empowerment of women, especially young women, is crucial. We welcome the establishment of UN Women. Now the member states need to provide UN Women with the tools and opportunities to further advance the rights and well-being of women and girls. We would have wanted to see clearer messages on several key issues to curb the epidemic in the declaration we are to adopt.

We had hoped that the High Level Meeting would have acknowledged the importance of sexual and reproductive rights in the declaration. It is essential to ensure that everyone have the right to decide freely and responsibly on their own sexual life, regardless of whether they are women or men, and regardless of their sexual orientation. Everyone, including young people, should have access to comprehensive education on human sexuality and to services and commodities such as male and female condoms.

The new declaration, which we welcome, marks a new phase in the response to HIV worldwide. We have clear and ambitious targets to work towards, and with this declaration the global community can better target our interventions. I am confident that the new and ambitious HIV-strategies of UNAIDS and WHO will serve as good tools to implement the declaration. Through the adoption of these bold and brave strategies, we as member states have already provided the tool to implement this declaration.

In transforming our HIV and AIDS response, we strongly believe in youth leadership. Young people must be given leadership roles in the AIDS response. We have confidence in organisations and projects that are run by young people, and acknowledge that young people are provided access to funding. Norway has in all the high level meetings on AIDS had a youth representative in the official delegation, and we encourage all governments to make use of the competence of youth in such roles. Youth representatives must have the same rights as other representatives in the delegations, and must be financed by the respective countries or the UN.

Faith based groups and organizations have contributed greatly to the global response to AIDS. Having acknowledged that, we must also admit that some religious preaching have added to the burden of many persons living with HIV. They have experienced rejection and stigma from faith communities. We have been disappointed during the negotiations of this declaration to learn that representatives of faiths have not been helpful in fighting stigma, promoting dignity and addressing the needs and rights of marginal groups. We applaud the many faith based communities as well as other civil society actors that promote human rights and dignity of marginalized people in their HIV/AIDS related work.

President,

We have reduced the burden of HIV in the world. But there are still major challenges ahead. Prevention must be given higher priority, focusing on existing, new and innovative ways of promoting behaviour change and better medical interventions. Prevention and treatment must be mutually reinforcing, and better treatment regimens need to be made available. Priority must continue to be given to research and the development of innovative methods for prevention, treatment and patient monitoring.

This high level review is an opportunity to make clear choices that will have important implications for the future. Together we can achieve the ambitious targets we have committed us to through this new declaration. I will assure you that Norway remains a committed partner in this important endeavor.

