

8 April 2011

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Joseph Deiss,
President of the 65th Session of the General Assembly,
at the General Assembly Civil Society Hearing on HIV/AIDS**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Five years ago, the United Nations General Assembly set an ambitious goal: to achieve universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010.

This goal motivated governments, civil society and UN organizations and stimulated action. It gave us a clear target toward which we directed resources and efforts.

We vowed to pursue “all necessary efforts” toward universal access by 2010. The 2010 deadline has now passed and it is time to hold ourselves accountable against our commitments.

In terms of treatment, the world realized – over a period of just five years – a ten-fold increase in the number of people with access to HIV medicine. Millions of lives have been saved.

In terms of prevention, new HIV infections have fallen by nearly 20% worldwide since the 2001 Special Session on HIV/AIDS. In Africa, the continent most affected by the epidemic, more than 30 countries have stabilized or reduced infection rates.

This is remarkable. But there is no room for complacency. Over 10 million people are still awaiting life-saving treatment. And far too many people, among which children, are infected by HIV every day.

By the time world leaders convene in June to adopt a new declaration on HIV/AIDS, unfortunately more people – not less – will be living with HIV. Allow me to thank here the co-facilitators, his Excellency Ambassador Gary Quinlan and his Excellency Ambassador Charles Ntwaagae for having accepted to lead the consultations on the outcome document on my behalf and for their excellent support.

We have to fight to consolidate and accelerate the progress of recent years – and this in a still fragile economic environment. To achieve tangible and sustainable results, we – representatives from the government, civil society and the private sector - we have to join forces to guide and monitor the AIDS response beyond 2011.

I am pleased that this interactive hearing takes place at this particular point in time - that is - just before the start of informal consultations among Member states on the outcome of the High-level meeting.

In this regard, I would like to give special credit to the Civil Society Task Force for its critical role in the preparations for this hearing.

The engagement of civil society and the private sector is indispensable in holding governments accountable, in ensuring that the AIDS response respects human rights, and in advocating for the creation of legal and social environments that protect people from infection and support social justice.

I also want to emphasize that the response to AIDS must include – at all levels – people living with, and affected by, HIV. Their perspective and experience are unique and have provided a wellspring of insight and breakthroughs.

I am pleased that many of you accepted my invitation. Especially because your involvement in today's hearing should help boost our efforts to overcome stigma and discrimination.

Thirty years of struggle have apparently not diminished your passion and resolve. Since the time you sounded the first alarm bells in the 1980s, your voice remains as strong in promoting accountability for the AIDS epidemic.

I am confident that Member States represented in today's hearing are eager to listen. And we shall do so with genuine interest.

This hearing is not meant to serve as a court where judgment will be passed. Rather, it seeks to promote the exchange of knowledge and ideas and the sharing of best practices. Let us seize this exceptional opportunity to learn from each other and to work together.

The success of universal access and of an effective response to the AIDS epidemic beyond 2010 demands it.