



# UNITED NATIONS General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS



25-27 JUNE 2001, NEW YORK

## THE FACTS tell a grim story, with glimmers of hope:

More than 21 million people have died of AIDS since the 1980s, over 75 per cent of them in sub-Saharan Africa.

Some 36 million people are currently infected with the HIV virus — over 25 million of them in Africa — and most of them do not know it.

In 16 countries, more than 10 per cent of adults, aged 15-49, are infected with the HIV virus. In 7 countries, all in southern Africa, at least one adult in five is living with HIV.

In the most affected countries, half of all 15-year-olds alive today will eventually die of the disease, even if infection rates drop in the next few years. If infection rates remain high, more than two-thirds of these young people will die of AIDS.

More than 13 million children have been orphaned by AIDS, and that figure may reach 30 million before the end of the decade.

AIDS is having a serious impact on many societies and economies, destroying the hard-won development gains that have been made in recent years.

Countries like Brazil, Thailand and Uganda have shown that strong national plans, social openness and community participation can indeed reverse spiralling infection rates.

## Why a special session?

Alarmed by the accelerating epidemic and its global impact, the United Nations General Assembly has decided to convene a special session on HIV/AIDS at the highest political level. To be held from 25 to 27 June 2001 in New York, the special session will aim to intensify international action to fight the epidemic and to mobilize the resources needed.

"The evidence demonstrates that we are not powerless against this epidemic, but our response is still at a fraction of what it needs to be," said Dr. Peter Piot, Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS

(UNAIDS) in a June 2000 status report. "The real task now," he added, "is to increase, massively, the political will, resources, systems and social commitment needed to turn the tide of the epidemic."

At the special session, high-level national delegations will discuss what action plans have proven most effective in addressing the AIDS situation in their own countries and what next steps are needed. Interactive round-tables will bring together government leaders, AIDS activists and experts and private sector partners to focus on key issues.

## What will the outcome be?

Given the urgency of the epidemic, at the special session governments are expected to agree on a Declaration of Commitment that will outline priority areas where stronger action must be taken. These are likely to include prevention, improved access to care and treatment, care of children orphaned by AIDS, expanded

public/private sector partnerships, the need for an accelerated multisectoral response to the epidemic and for resources commensurate with the crisis.

The special session is also expected to set a number of concrete targets for action to fight HIV/AIDS, building on goals adopted at previous United Nations forums. *(over)*

*"We must make people everywhere understand that the AIDS crisis is not over; that this is not about a few foreign countries, far away. This is a threat to an entire generation; this is a threat to an entire civilization...."*

*The General Assembly special session will provide us with an occasion as never before to face up to our responsibility to future generations, and take decisive action now to turn back the progress of this terrible disease."*

**United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan**

*(from previous page)*

These include the target agreed by some 150 heads of State and Government at the UN Millennium Summit in September 2000, to halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015.

The Declaration of Commitment will be developed through open-ended informal consultations to be convened in

early 2001 by the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Harri Holkeri of Finland. A report by the United Nations Secretary-General will set the stage for the consultations by making recommendations for how to secure a global political commitment for greater efforts at the national, regional and international levels.

## Timeline for 2001

### 26 February to 2 March —

First round of open-ended informal consultations for the special session (New York)

**21 to 25 May**— Second round of open-ended informal consultations (New York)

**25 to 27 June** — Special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS (New York)

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### On the Internet

[www.un.org/ga/aids](http://www.un.org/ga/aids)

## Participation by NGOs and private sector

Recognizing the key role played by activists, people living with HIV/AIDS, experts and business leaders in the fight against AIDS, the United Nations is planning ways to involve civil society in the special session and its preparations. The UNAIDS Secretariat will coordinate such participation through its ongoing network of partners. Electronic forums on the UNAIDS and other web sites will enable non-governmental organizations and other partners to have input into the negotiations for the special session. A concerted effort will be made to involve young people, whose future is at stake.