



**UNITED NATIONS
SPECIAL SESSION
ON HIV/AIDS**

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Press Release

UN Special Session on HIV/AIDS Seeks to Spur Massive Global Response to Crisis

Secretary-General's Call to Action Urges Alliance to Turn the Tide in Fight against AIDS

(New York, June 2001) - The United Nations is set to mobilize a greatly intensified global response to the AIDS epidemic when it holds a Special Session on HIV/AIDS from 25 to 27 June in New York.

The Special Session aims to galvanize political commitment and leadership to tackle what nations have agreed constitutes a "global emergency". Governments are expected to adopt a Declaration of Commitment setting out a series of strategic targets and timetables. Over 36 million people worldwide are infected with HIV and over 22 million have died.

"HIV/AIDS is a global problem of catastrophic proportions," said Secretary-General Kofi Annan. "The challenge is enormous, but we are not powerless to face it. That is why I have made it my personal priority to form a global alliance commensurate with the challenge."

The Secretary-General has embarked on a campaign to urge governments, the private sector and non-governmental organizations to join forces for a massive mobilization against the epidemic. In a series of speeches to key audiences over the past two months, he has set out priority action areas and called for the creation of a global AIDS and health fund to channel some of the new funding required. "The world has the resources to defeat this epidemic, if it really wants to," the Secretary-General told a conference of private foundations in late April.

Spending on AIDS prevention and care in low and middle income countries needs to rise to between seven and ten billion dollars each year, according to estimates by the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). This is at least five times the amount currently spent by citizens, national governments and international donors. Initial pledges of over \$400 million for the global fund have already been received, and other commitments of additional money are expected at the Special Session and, among other important events, at the G8 summit in Genoa in July.

Recent developments have set the stage for the Special Session to be a watershed event in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Several major pharmaceutical companies have announced steep price cuts for seriously affected countries for drugs used to treat AIDS or related infections. Starting with the Okinawa summit of the G8 last year, many developed and developing country Governments have stepped up their commitments for action. Most recently, African leaders pledged in Abuja at an OAU special summit to devote 15 per cent of their national budgets to the health sector and the struggle against HIV/AIDS.

"We have reached a point at which many factors and forces are coming together in a unique way," said Dr. Peter Piot, Executive Director of UNAIDS. "I believe that we now have an opportunity for a quantum leap forward in the way in which we respond, as an international community, to the epidemic. The Declaration of Commitment that national leaders adopt at the Special Session means that we have a new level of transparency and seriousness in turning back the epidemic. The millions of people infected and affected by HIV are watching this process, and they, quite rightly, have high expectations of the process and its outcomes."

Global Targets and Timetables

The draft Declaration of Commitment expected to be adopted at the Session has taken shape over several months of informal talks led by two Co-facilitators, Ambassador Penny Wensley of Australia and Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka of Senegal. Building on the targets adopted at the UN Millennium Summit, agreement has been reached on a number of key goals, including:

- By 2003, to set time-bound national targets in order to reduce HIV infection among 15 to 24-year-olds by 25 per cent in the most affected countries by 2005, and globally by 2010.

- By 2005, to ensure that at least 90 per cent of 15 to 24-year-olds have access to information and services needed to reduce their vulnerability.
- By 2005, to reduce the proportion of infants infected with HIV by 20 per cent, and by 50 per cent by 2010.
- By 2003, to develop national strategies to strengthen health care systems and address factors affecting the provision of HIV-related drugs, including affordability and pricing. Also, to urgently make every effort to provide the highest attainable standard of treatment for HIV/AIDS, including anti-retroviral therapy in a careful and monitored manner to reduce risk of developing resistance.
- By 2003 to develop, and by 2005 implement, national strategies to provide a supportive environment for orphans and children infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. Over 13 million children have lost a mother or both parents to the disease, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa.

Governments have also agreed in principle to reach, by 2005, the overall target of annual expenditure on the epidemic of between seven and ten billion dollars in low and middle income countries, and to support the establishment of the global fund proposed by the Secretary-General. It is expected that the few remaining contentious issues — primarily concerning human rights and vulnerable groups — will be resolved in consultations just prior to the Special Session or during the Session itself.

Most governments will be represented at the Special Session by Cabinet ministers, but a number of heads of State or Government have confirmed their plans to attend, reflecting the importance being given to the epidemic by national leaders.

Round Tables and Special Events

At the Special Session, in addition to making formal statements, governments, NGOs and private sector representatives will participate in four round tables, an innovative format used at the Millennium Summit to encourage interaction among leaders. The round tables will focus on key issues, namely:

- "HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care", chaired by the Prime Minister of St. Kitts and Nevis
- "HIV/AIDS and Human Rights", chaired by the Health Minister of Poland
- "Socio-economic Impact of HIV/AIDS", chaired by the Health Minister of Malaysia
- "International Funding and Cooperation", chaired by the President of the United Republic of Tanzania

NGOs and the private sector are playing a crucial role in the battle against AIDS. At the Special Session, several CEOs are expected to announce initiatives, and the Global Business Council on HIV/AIDS will be launching its blueprint for business action.

Over 2,000 representatives of some 500 activist groups, service organizations, people living with HIV/AIDS and the private sector are expected to attend the Special Session, and their spokespersons will make statements in the plenary and participate in the round tables. Several dialogue sessions have been held between NGOs and governments to allow wider input into the Declaration of Commitment. Dozens of side events have been organized both inside and outside the UN premises in order to give expression to a range of views on issues and challenges. These include presentations by people living with AIDS and by volunteers and others working on the front lines of the battle against the epidemic. A schedule of all events can be found at the Session website: www.un.org/ga/aids.

The many United Nations agencies and programmes working on fighting AIDS will also be actively participating in the Special Session, as they gear up to help mobilize and support an intensified global response to the crisis. The Special Session was convened by the UN General Assembly in November 2000.

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