



2008 High-Level Meeting on AIDS

General Assembly, United Nations, New York

10 - 11 June 2008

Uniting the world against AIDS

Press release

Global AIDS epidemic far from over

Despite significant progress the AIDS epidemic continues to outpace the response

New York, Geneva 13 June 2008 – The global AIDS epidemic continues to threaten economic and social development. Whilst recognising the significant progress in the AIDS response, there was renewed commitment by countries and civil society to work with UNAIDS and other partners to reach towards universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010.

These were some of the messages coming out of the 2008 High-Level Meeting which took place at the United Nations headquarters in New York from 10-11 June. The meeting attracted high-level participation from UN Member States who, alongside representatives from civil society and UN agencies, funds and programmes came together to review progress made towards reaching the goal of providing universal access by 2010.

During the meeting countries highlighted the significant progress made in the areas of resources mobilization, increased political commitment and participation of civil society organizations in the response and the exceptional scale-up of antiretroviral therapy

“History will judge how effectively we rose to the challenge of AIDS,” said H.E. Srgjan Kerim, President of the UN General Assembly in his closing statement. “We must not lose the momentum of our global response.”

The need for greater accountability, particularly in relation to funds spent by all stakeholders; the need to adapt HIV prevention programming to local contexts and the lack of effective programming directed to populations which are especially vulnerable to the disease, especially sex workers, men who have sex with men, transgender populations and injecting drug users, and the continued criminalization of related behaviours were some of the challenges highlighted by countries and civil society. Participants also called for removal of travel restrictions for people living with HIV.

In 2007, around USD 10 billion was estimated to be available for the global response to the epidemic but the shortfall between actual need and funds available was estimated to be around USD 8 billion. Many donor countries attending the meeting reiterated their support for the global response over the long-term.

The United Nations Secretary-General Mr. Ban Ki-moon presented the report on progress in implementing the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the 2006 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS. Speaking on occasion Mr. Ban said, “Our challenge now is to build on what we have started, bridge the gaps we know exist, and step up our efforts in years to come. We can do this only if we sustain and step up our levels of commitment and financing.”

The role of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) in the response was recognised by countries as a critical element. Several emphasised the need for the UN system to ensure that national efforts are coordinated and complementary for progress towards the universal access goals by 2010 to move forward.

Dr Peter Piot, Executive Director of UNAIDS said, “This has been an extraordinary meeting. The commitment shown here by countries highlights the collective consensus that there is still much to do. We must capitalise on the commitment to urgently scale up services. UNAIDS will continue to support countries in maintaining an exceptional, long-term response to the epidemic.”

Countries called upon UNAIDS to strengthen HIV prevention programmes to better reflect local realities and provide support for scaling up treatment programmes.

Many specifically highlighted the recent dramatic increases in numbers of people on treatment but recognised that if HIV prevention efforts were not stepped up these successes would be difficult to maintain. A point that Dr Piot made during the meeting, “We cannot treat our way out of this epidemic. For every two people put on treatment, five are newly infected with HIV. Unless we act now, treatment queues will get longer and longer and it will become more and more difficult to get anywhere near universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support.” he said.

Countries also recognised AIDS as a public health as well as a development issue needing a multisectoral response and stated that the scaling up the AIDS response helps to strengthen health systems. Human rights and gender issues were singled out as imperative to an effective response and leadership and political accountability were underlined as the most important part of the solution.

For more information, see: www.un.org/ga/aidsmeeting2008

For webcasts of official meetings and press conferences, see: www.un.org/webcast

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