High-level Meeting on the Comprehensive Review of the Progress Achieved in Realizing the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS. General Assembly, United Nations Plenary Meeting.

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**STATEMENT**

by

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Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset let me thank the Secretary-General for his excellent report on the progress the international community has made in the fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic, but also on challenges which are still ahead.

Mr. President,

Poland fully associates itself with the statement of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union. Here I would like to share with you some thoughts from the national perspective.

The Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS of 2001, as well as the Political Declaration adopted six years later, have become the foundation for the global progress achieved in the fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Thanks to these documents the need to respect human rights in the context of the epidemic has been underlined, and gained greater importance. It is a crucial aspect, because if we want to be effective in our action, we must not forget about the fact that behind the HIV/AIDS statistics there are individual human tragedies, such as incurable disease, stigmatization, lack of understanding, social exclusion, bereavement, or death.

Therefore, in the fight against the epidemic, partnership, both on national and international level and involvement of different stakeholders, including people living with HIV and civil society, is so important.

Let me now speak about the progress that has been achieved in Poland during seven years of implementing the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS.

In Poland, a country of thirty-eight million inhabitants, 700 HIV infections are diagnosed each year. Since the beginning of the epidemic, that is to say since 1985, 11,500 infections have been reported, and according to estimations, at present there are about 30,000 people infected with HIV or suffering from AIDS. Therefore we can talk about a stable epidemiological situation, which is beyond doubt a result of having taken actions early enough at the governmental level, but also to a broad collaboration between the Government and numerous nongovernmental organizations.

Since the very beginning of the epidemic, the Minister of Health has provided financial support to nongovernmental organizations to implement prevention programmes, as well as programmes aimed at reducing the negative effects of the epidemic. Since 2001 the number of these NGOs has grown considerably. In 2007, the Government
supported approximately fifty civil society organizations working in the field of tackling the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

In the fight against HIV/AIDS, Poland fully supports and implements the Three Ones principle. Within the Polish Government, the Minister of Health, represented by the National AIDS Centre, is responsible for combating the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In day to day work he is represented by the National AIDS Centre. Since 1994, successive versions of a national strategy on combating the epidemic have been implemented. At present, we have been implementing the National Programme of Combating AIDS and Preventing HIV Infections for the years 2007-2011. The programme encompasses a comprehensive strategy of fighting against the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and reflects a strong determination of the Polish Government to implement the relevant commitment included in the Millennium Declaration (MDG VI).

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me now turn to some specific questions. No progress in fighting the epidemic can be achieved without a universal access to diagnostics, antiretroviral treatment and comprehensive care for patients living with HIV and AIDS.

Today I am pleased to remind you that Poland was the first country in Eastern and Central Europe to offer a free-of-charge access to antiretroviral medicines and tests to monitor therapy, including genotyping, to patients who meet medical criteria.

Since 2001, the number of patients on ARV therapy has increased by more than two and a half times. At present, everyone who meets medical criteria, including marginalized populations, people in penitentiary centres and asylum seekers, overall 3,500 patients, receives such a treatment. The Minister of Health has systematically increased the funds for the Programme of ARV therapy. In 2007, total funds amounted to about 45 mln US dollars.

In Poland, like in other countries, we struggle with the problem of limited financial resources, nevertheless, the system of purchasing ARV drugs and drugs management monitoring, which was established in 2001 and has been developed by the National AIDS Centre ever since, has allowed us to optimize the prices and made the best use of the funds at our disposal.

In recent years, we achieved an important progress in terms of mother-to-child transmission prophylaxis. Thanks to the introduction of special information programmes and campaigns addressing pregnant women, we have managed to reduce the vertical infections rate from 25% to less than 1%! All pregnant women who are
diagnosed HIV-positive are included in the mother-to-child transmission prophylaxis programme. Our country successfully implements reproductive health programmes, which facilitate serodiscordant couples to have healthy children. Specialists and PLWHA from Eastern Europe have repeatedly benefited from the Polish experience in this field.

In Poland a lot of attention is paid to respecting human rights and human dignity in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. International guidelines on HIV/AIDS and human rights have been translated into Polish in order to ensure their more effective promotion and accessibility. Recommendations contained in these guidelines are being systematically implemented.

A holistic approach to issues related to the epidemic, an early introduction of methadone substitution therapy programmes (as early as in 1997) and the development of the scope of intravenous drug use harm reduction programmes, are only part of the anti-discrimination policy towards HIV-positive people.

Other activities related to the promotion of human rights are also systematically implemented and developed. They include broad social consultations at all levels, activities aiming at providing people affected by the HIV/AIDS with the possibility to benefit from counseling on legal issues, and at promoting a policy of equal opportunities of women and men.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I have already mentioned, Poland is a country of a strong partnership between the Government and the civil society. This collaboration is most visible in the realization of prevention programmes, including a systematic development of the network of Voluntary Counselling and Testing sites, where one can take a free-of-charge and anonymous HIV test and receive pre- and post-test counselling. In 2001, there were 11 VCT centres, while in 2008 there are already 26 sites in all major cities nationwide. Thanks to media education campaigns, between the years 2001 and 2007 the number of people who took a free-of-charge, anonymous and voluntary HIV test grew more than six times.

There has been an increase in the number and range of trainings for various professional groups (including teachers, medical staff and uniformed services), organized in collaboration with nongovernmental organizations, also using innovative communication methods such as e-learning.
Each year, in co-operation with numerous partners, including those from the private sector, the National AIDS Centre conducts multimedia information and education campaigns. The target groups are chosen according to the epidemiological situation. When the campaign is concluded, its effectiveness is carefully analyzed.

In Poland, we are pleased to support a growing commitment of the private sector to the fight against HIV/AIDS. Poland also actively cooperates with international organizations dealing with the issue of HIV/AIDS. In recent months we have intensified our collaboration with the HIV/AIDS Programme of the International Labour Organization. In order to promote the best practices in terms of HIV/AIDS in the workplace, “Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the world of work” has been translated into Polish. Its principles are increasingly used by large private companies, which more and more often decide to introduce HIV/AIDS educational programmes for their employees and customers.

I wish to underline that Poland has been systematically increasing financial resources destined to support countries particularly affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Through almost twenty five years of the fight against the epidemic we have elaborated many good practices, which we willingly share with other countries.

Mr. President,

Despite the unquestionable progress that has been achieved in our country in the fight against HIV/AIDS, we are well aware that there is still a lot to be done in the process of implementation of the resolution of the Declaration of Commitment in Poland, as well as in other countries.

The issues we should take close care of in the nearest future are the HIV/HCV co-infection treatment, the intensification of educational activities for the young people as well as the scientific research.

Let me conclude by reiterating on behalf of the Polish Government our strong commitment to the fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic, as well as the problems of people affected by the epidemic and living with the virus.

We will also continue our efforts to develop the international co-operation in this regard. Poland strongly believes that only by joining the forces of all interested actors we will be able to fulfill the commitments adopted in 2001, and save millions of human beings from the destruction caused by the epidemic itself and by its consequences.

Thank you for your attention.