



United Nations Press Release

Annan Calls for Greater Accountability in Efforts to Stop HIV/AIDS

New York, 30 November--United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan marked World AIDS Day at an interfaith ceremony today with a call to leaders at all levels to intensify efforts to halt and reverse the spread of AIDS.

"The stakes in the struggle against AIDS are higher now than ever," Mr. Annan said. "We cannot risk letting the advances that have been achieved unravel; we must not jeopardize the heroic efforts of so many. The challenge now is to deliver on all the promises that Governments have made."

Speaking at St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church in New York, the Secretary-General said that accountability, the theme of this World AIDS Day, "requires every President and Prime Minister, every parliamentarian and politician, to decide and declare that 'AIDS stops with me'."

He said that accountability requires these leaders to strengthen protection for all vulnerable groups -- whether people living with HIV, young people, sex workers, injecting drug users, or men who have sex with men. Accountability demands that these leaders work for real, positive change that will give more power and confidence to women and girls, and transform relations between women and men at all levels of society.

"But accountability applies not only to those who hold positions of power. It also applies to all of us. It requires business leaders to work for HIV prevention in the workplace and in the wider community, and to care for affected workers and their families. It requires men to help ensure that other men assume their responsibility -- and understand that real manhood means protecting others from risk. And it requires every one of us help bring AIDS out of the shadows, and spread the message that silence is death," said the Secretary-General.

UNAIDS recently reported that an estimated 39.5 million people in the world are living with HIV, with 4.3 million people becoming infected in 2006. More than half of these new infections-- 2.8 million (65%) - occurred in sub-Saharan Africa; significant increases were also reported in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. In 2006, 2.9 million people died of AIDS-related illnesses. The report also found that where HIV prevention programmes have not been sustained, infection rates are staying the same or going back up.

As the global AIDS epidemic continues to grow, the UNAIDS report found evidence that some countries that had showed earlier successes in reducing infections have either slowed or are now experiencing increasing infection rates. However, declines in infection rates are also being observed in some countries, and positive trends in the sexual behaviour of young people have been found.

Mr. Annan said in the 25 years since the first case was reported, AIDS has changed the world, killing 25 million people and infecting 40 million more. The epidemic has become the world's leading cause of death among both women and men aged 15 to 59.

"It has inflicted the single greatest reversal in the history of human development," said the Secretary-General, and "... it has become the greatest challenge of our generation."

He said he was encouraged by changes in the world's attitude towards the disease over the past 10 years, during which the fight against HIV and AIDS has started to be taken as seriously as it deserves.

"Financial resources are being committed like never before," he stated. "People have access to antiretroviral treatment like never before. Several countries are managing to fight the spread like never before. But as the spread continues, we need to mobilize like never before."

During his tenure, Mr. Annan has helped mobilize international support for a sustained global campaign to fight HIV and AIDS. In 2001, determined to help the world step up its response to HIV/AIDS, the Secretary-General issued a global Call to Action identifying key priorities, from prevention to treatment. Declaring the battle against AIDS his personal priority, the Secretary-General called for a "war chest" of \$7-10 billion per year to be spent on the fight against the epidemic.

In response to a call from the Secretary-General, in 2002 the world rose yet again to the formidable challenge to confront the AIDS epidemic with the founding of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, of which Mr. Annan is a patron. To date, US \$6.8 billion has been committed in 136 countries. The Secretary-General's advocacy also has helped to increase access to drugs and diagnostics in poor settings, particularly from some of the world's major pharmaceutical companies working on HIV and AIDS.

In his remarks tonight, Mr. Annan vowed to remain on the forefront of fighting HIV and AIDS, stating, "As long as I have strength, I will keep spreading that message, [that silence is death]."

At the event, the Executive Director of UNAIDS, Dr. Peter Piot, and other speakers, including a representative of the movement of people living with HIV/AIDS, joined the Secretary-General in urging the world to Keep the Promise of stopping AIDS.

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