



HIV and AIDS:

facilitator for entry of other diseases and source of frustration of personal and institutional plans

**Address by HE Armando Emílio Guebuza, President of the Republic of
Mozambique HIGH Level meeting on HIV and AIDS**

New York, 10 June 2008

Mr. President;

Mr. Secretary General of the United Nations;

Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government;

Distinguished Representatives of Civil Society Organizations;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

We join the previous speakers in congratulating the United Nations for having organized this event, whose importance and relevance are underlined by its agenda. This forum constitutes yet another opportunity for us, as nations and multilateral institution, to reaffirm our role in addressing the threat posed by HIV and AIDS to our development agenda.

In Mozambique, we have been facing this challenge head on. In February 2006 a Presidential Initiative on HIV and AIDS was launched. Separate meetings were held with women, religious leaders, business people, community leaders and the youth. The initiative has since been replicated at provincial and district levels and in various public and private institutions. One cannot categorically draw direct link between this initiative and the changes in attitude we see in the country but what is a fact is that:

- ❖ People now talk more freely and openly about AIDS and begin to view it more as another chronic disease rather than a death sentence;
- ❖ We have reduced the rate of infection from 16,2% to 16%, though parts of Southern Mozambique require greater attention;

- ❖ More people volunteer for testing and counseling and many more are less ashamed to access the health units for care and treatment.

Thanks to the commitment of our Government and partners, tangible strides have also been made in the country:

- ❖ We have succeeded in effectively scaling up access and utilization of HIV care and treatment to impressive levels since 2004. From 6,000, in January 2005, we have, in April this year, reached the figure of over 100,000 Mozambicans on Anti-Retroviral Therapy;
- ❖ We have also made tremendous improvements in the prevention of mother to child transmission and have guaranteed HIV and AIDS care and treatment across all 128 districts. From an initial 21 health facilities at the end of 2004, there are presently 215 health units which offer Anti Retroviral Therapy in the country. Children have access to Anti Retroviral Therapy in 170 of these health facilities.

Despite the availability of treatment and encouragement of our citizens to access it, our national strategy focus, primarily, on prevention measures targeting the most vulnerable groups, namely the youth, women, children and people with high mobility. We have since come to learn that prevention remains a great challenge. The fact that HIV awareness programmes are widespread and the fact that more people are aware of the dangers posed by AIDS do not translate into fast scaling down of the infection rates.

We have, therefore, established a task force, chaired by the Minister of Health, to look into how we can make prevention more effective. This task force will present its report at the end of this month. It is our hope that their report will shed more light on what has to be done to revert the current situation.

From our experience in dealing with this pandemic its association with TB has become evident. We were pleased yesterday that the session organized by the UN Secretary General Special Envoy to Stop TB also underscored the need to strengthen an integration of HIV/TB activities. More importantly, we need to strengthen our national health system, as a whole, to deliver more efficiently across the Nation. We count on our partners in this regard.

The will to defeat the HIV and AIDS and other killer diseases such as TB and malaria is clear from this august audience. Let us, therefore, rededicate ourselves to implement:

- ❖ The MDGs;
- ❖ The Abuja Declaration and Framework for Action for the fight against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and other related diseases in Africa; and
- ❖ The United Nation General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS;

Thank you very much for your kind attention.