

## Opening Plenary Speaker

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Your Excellencies, President of the General Assembly, Secretary General, Honorable Delegates and my dear fellow community members.

I stand before you as a woman from Asia Pacific, where women's highest risk for HIV infection is through marriage.

For more than twenty five years now, we have known how HIV is transmitted and can be prevented, but some governments still believe that they can protect **their** country from HIV by stopping "non-nationals infected with HIV" from entering their country.

Attitudes and policies such as these will not contribute to reaching the goal of Universal Access; it will however contribute to increased stigma and discrimination of people living with HIV.

Yet, your countries have committed to the goal of Universal Access by 2010. So we are halfway there and I ask, "How strong do you hold that commitment?"

In my region, experts say there is a "concentrated" epidemic. By that they mean HIV is contained within marginalized and vulnerable groups such as drug users, sex workers, gay men, Men Who Have Sex with Men; many of whom are married, transgenders, migrant workers, prisoners and even refugees who are being infected with HIV at a higher rate. Yet they are often denied or have limited access to HIV Prevention, Treatment, Care and Support.

I ask you, "why?" Are we not all human and deserving of the same rights and treatment?

These communities are not only at a higher risk of HIV in Asia, it is the same everywhere. If you allow one group to become infected with HIV, you will never stop the epidemic. Isn't that the lesson we have learned?

In fact the epidemic is moving out of concentrated groups into the

general population. Look at the increasing rates of infection among women, children and youth. This is where you can see the effect of falsely believing that HIV will remain isolated among certain groups.

These groups need services that are sensitive to their needs, supported with adequate finances and resources. Instead, many countries have criminalized behaviors that push people underground and make them afraid to come forward to receive proper prevention and treatment.

As the Honorable UN Secretary General, Mr. Ban Ki Moon, recently noted, and I quote “We must guard against legislation that blocks universal access by criminalizing the lifestyles of vulnerable groups. We have to find ways to reach out to sex workers, men who have sex with men and drug users, ensuring that they have what they need to protect themselves.”

Here, communities, NGOs and people living with HIV can complement and build upon your efforts. You cannot do it alone. We have to work hand in hand together! Here are some recommendations:

Decriminalize behaviors associated with risk of HIV that are targeted at specific groups.

Eliminate mandatory testing of migrant workers and travel restrictions of people living with HIV.

Pass enabling laws that make it easier to get the right prevention method to people who need them, especially clean needles to drug users and condoms to sex workers and their clients.

Stop treating HIV as a separate issue: link the UNGASS on HIV with the UNGASS on drugs; integrate reproductive health, gender and human rights into HIV prevention and address co-infection of Hepatitis C and TB with urgent prevention and treatment responses.

Make treatment affordable and easy to access for all. Explore exercising the TRIPS Flexibility such as compulsory licenses for HIV, Hepatitis C, TB and other essential medicines.

And let us, the Community, sit at the table and make decisions with you.

I am also a Person Living With HIV, and by revealing my HIV status publicly, I am taking a risk of being banned from entering this country and over seventy other countries around the world.

When I found out about my HIV status in 2006, it was thought in my country that only Sex Workers and Drug users got infected. I am neither. But really what does it matter how I got infected?

As a woman living with HIV, I could be accused of bringing HIV into my home, beaten for something I didn't do, stripped of any inheritance rights and thrown out in the streets because of a health condition.

As a woman I need my human rights respected as well as my rights to property and inheritance, I need protection against domestic and sexual violence, I need to be able to manage and control all matters related to my sexuality and reproductive health. As a Person Living with HIV I need equal access to prevention, treatment, care and support. As a mother I ask this not only for myself but for my daughter and future generations.

In closing, I am committed to the working for the best possible life for people everywhere. While it is not my intention to embarrass anyone or point fingers, I do want to ask, what is more embarrassing and shameful than a tragedy that could have been prevented. We have the tools and knowledge. We need the will.

But more than anything else, we need action!

Keep your promise and renew your commitment of Universal Access by 2010. To not do so would mean to condemn many people living with HIV, like myself, to unnecessary pain, suffering and... even death. I will honor my commitment and so I ask. Will you honor yours?