



MISION PERMANENTE DE EL SALVADOR
ANTE LAS NACIONES UNIDAS

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY
SIXTIETH SESSION**

**2006 HIGH-LEVEL MEETING ON AIDS
UNITING THE WORLD AGAINST AIDS**

**STATEMENT BY H.E.
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PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF EL SALVADOR**

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Mr. President, Mr. Secretary General,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a privilege for El Salvador and the Central American countries, to attend this High Level meeting in order to review progress achieved in realizing the targets set out in the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS

25 years ago, when the first cases of HIV/AIDS were registered in the World, El Salvador was suffering an armed conflict, which took the life of 80,000 Salvadoran men, women and children.

Today, we have overcome and left behind those unfortunate days and have healed the majority of those deep social wounds, having achieved the implementation of a successful peace process, involving all the parties. Due to the United Nations good offices and the support of the International Community we have turned into a country committed to life, freedom, social development and well being.

We have adhered to these principles as part of our governance. El Salvador is confronted today with new challenges, which are no longer based on ideological positions, but rather oriented towards strategies against poverty, violence and hunger and other social issues. Since then, we have become acquainted, with the global challenge concerning the Human Immunodeficiency Virus.

In El Salvador we are also suffering the effects of this pandemic. Within our national borders there are more than Thirty thousand (30,000) persons living with HIV, who have been infected by virus during the past 25 years.

The Government of El Salvador, as well as our society is deeply concern about the heavy burden of the stigma and discrimination endured by those affected with HIV/AIDS, as well as their families, co-partners and friends. In this context, our country is committed to take the necessary measures, to suppress discriminatory attitudes at the individual, social, public and private level. We hope that a better knowledge concerning their situation will help protecting the rights of the persons with HIV/AIDS.

All together, civil society, government and persons living with HIV/AIDS, we can transform today's reality in the world. It is essential, we all get involved to assist our brothers and sisters who live with HIV/AIDS in each of our countries, in order to combat these pandemic. We must not exclude them, for they are part of the struggle.

Five years after the twenty sixth special session of the United Nations General Assembly, where we committed ourselves, unanimously, to fight against the scourge of HIV/AIDS, El Salvador has been able to comply and make progress towards all the objectives of the Declaration. We have begun to reduce the effects of this global epidemic; which brings mourning and grief to many places in the world, without distinction of race, creed, age or socio-economic strata.

It is with great pride, as Head of Government of a hard-working and tireless people, that I can say that Salvadoran response to comply with the international commitments has proved to be significant at the political level as well as in the financing and scope of the prevention programs.

Mr. President,

I would like to point out briefly some of the achievements reached in my country, which I previously refer to:

Thanks to an integral prevention strategy, based on moral values and efficient-proof scientific measures, in order to respond to the HIV control, we have been able to prevent an increase in the number of new infections, reducing by three points the annual rate of HIV, and by four points the annual rate of AIDS. This constitutes a significant step forward in order to reach the goal of reducing and detaining the epidemic for year 2015.

Committed with the objective to assure treatments for the persons with HIV, El Salvador has carried out a significant progress towards such goal. It would be unfair not to acknowledge, that the Salvadoran civil society participation was fundamental to start with such action. It raised its voice on behalf of the persons with HIV. This made possible for my predecessors as Heads of States to begin the first hospital treatments as part as the national public health network.

Since 2001 we have increased by fifty times the number of persons that receive therapy. At present, our program on the struggle against AIDS guarantees 100% coverage integral attention and free-of-charge treatment, to all the persons with HIV. In addition, we have incremented by more than 100% the availability of HIV assessment tests.

It feels me with profound satisfaction to share with you that during the course of the last few years, we have reduced by more than 85% the number of children born with HIV. These Salvadoran children, who have been saved from the terrible burden of being born with HIV, must continue to be protected. Therefore, we have to assure that in the course of their lives they will have the necessary skills and protection to free themselves from the Human Immunodeficiency Virus infection.

This young generation is our hope and our future. It is for them and many others thousands in the world that we must act now. The universal access, more than a goal, must become a daily reality in today's world.

In November last year, we were honored as a country to host the Central America and Dominican Republic leaders' summit, to discuss mainly the issue of HIV/AIDS. The Heads of States of the Central American Integration System (SICA), signed the Declaration of San Salvador, by which we committed ourselves to redouble our efforts in the struggle against AIDS, fostering policies and regional strategies that support the well being of the persons living with HIV/AIDS, reducing the population vulnerability in regard to HIV/AIDS, and controlling the epidemic expansion in our region.

El Salvador attends this High Level meeting with responsibility and pride facing our important goals in the combat against HIV/AIDS. I stand before you, representing El Salvador, as a liable member state, grateful to the international community, and willing to share our modest experience, as member of the Programme Coordination Board of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), for the period 2007-2010.

Mr. President,

Through our own achievements El Salvador foresees an encouraging scenario towards the compliance of goal number 6 of the Millennium Development Objectives, to be achieved by 2015.

Our main challenge today as well as in the near future is to achieve financial sustainability for all the on-going programs in order to reduce the number of HIV cases, and strengthen the integral attention in favor of our Salvadoran population, who currently live with the virus.

Paradoxically these achievements carried out in El Salvador and in other Latin American countries; due to the fact that we are medium-low income countries, tend to become a new obstacle, raising a gap between us and the donors and reducing their contributions to our programs.

Mr. President,

I allow myself to speak on behalf of more than 500 million Latin American people that raised their voice in order that our region is given the same importance, solidarity and interest as other regions, to combat this pandemic.

From Latin America, we also demand a sustainable and authentic support of the countries and donor organizations, such as World Fund, in order to combat this epidemic in our countries. We are aware that the struggle against AIDS requires effective measures and responses on the government's side as well as full participation from civil society. In addition is necessary to count on energetic commitment from all the international cooperation agencies and donors.

From this podium, I beg you not to delay such aid to our nations; do not put in place highly complex processes to assist those who must need it, for they can not wait for further delays nor do they understand budgets procedures.

Just as in the nineties El Salvador achieved, with the support of the international community, the end of the civil war and was able to build a successful peace process, today we need the same kind of help in order to continue confronting this pandemic successfully.

Mr. President,

El Salvador has achieved progress and has complied with the commitments acquired before the international community. The results obtained are evident and my presence at this meeting as President of my country proves, my determination and personal commitment to continue working tirelessly in this arduous task. We hope together with the Central and Latin American region not to continue seeing more suffering provoked by this terrible pandemic.

May I extend to you a most friendly invitation so that we commit ourselves to comply not only with the goals proposed for 2010 and 2015, but to continue together in the future.

Let us go forward, all of us providing the necessary attention that the persons who live with HIV deserve. Let us begin a true leadership in the struggle against AIDS, just as the Secretary General so aptly said it in one of his speeches: *"It implies to dare make things in a different way in order to understand that AIDS is a different illness, a rare illness in the experience of humanity, which we can only fight if we keep ourselves together"*. On my part, I promise you that the struggle against AIDS will continue to be one of the main issues in my government's agenda, for I wish to see a whole generation free of AIDS, as well as the stigma and discrimination that it carries with it.

May God bless us all now and always, I thank you very much.