



*The
Bahamas*

**UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
SIXTIETH SESSION**

**HIGH-LEVEL MEETING TO REVIEW THE PROGRESS
ACHIEVED IN REALIZING THE COMMITMENTS SET OUT IN
THE DECLARATION OF COMMITMENT ON HIV/AIDS**

STATEMENT BY

SENATOR THE HON. DR. BERNARD J. NOTTAGE

**MINISTER OF HEALTH AND NATIONAL INSURANCE
OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS**

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Mr. President,

The Commonwealth of The Bahamas applauds the continuing leadership and vision shown by the United Nations and its Secretary General, in forging political will and momentum to fight HIV/AIDS. The first Special Session on HIV/AIDS in June 2001, the 20th year of the epidemic, was convened at a critical time when global interest and commitment to the fight against HIV/AIDS was very low; HIV/AIDS had been placed on the back burner and was off the headlines and front pages. Donor interest was weak at best. No country was doing enough, and all countries could do more – much more.

The United Nations and its Secretary General led the charge resulting in the adoption of the landmark Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, to which we remain firmly committed, and the call to scale up treatment, care and support for those persons living with AIDS. It was clear then that too many people were dying without access to life saving drugs. The Special Session and the Declaration of Commitment galvanized the international community, as Governments, donors, and civil society seized the moment and the scaling up process began. It is indeed encouraging to see the renewed interest, indeed a rebirth, which has taken place over the ensuing years. What has happened is unprecedented, as life-saving treatment has begun to reach those most in need.

The Bahamas also applauds the commitment and vision of the late Dr. Lee Jon-Wook, Director General of the World Health Organization, who in 2003, unveiled the 3x5 Initiative as another important pillar in the scaling up process. Although this goal was not achieved, significant progress and accomplishments were made. More importantly, the commitment for universal access to treatment care and support by the international community is now apparent.

Mr. President,

Five years after that landmark special session, we stand at a crossroads, on the threshold of achieving great success against HIV/AIDS by achieving universal access by 2010 and further, the Millennium Development Goal of reversing HIV by 2015. We can stop AIDS.

Last September, The Bahamas was one of a few countries recognized by the Secretary General as having “turned the tide against AIDS”. The Bahamas’ National AIDS Programme has had some significant success as evidenced by the continued reduction in incidence and prevalence of HIV, and the successful scaling up of treatment, care and support. This in turn has led to a marked reduction in mother-to-child transmission of HIV from 30% to 1%, the placing of approximately 60% of the initial target population on treatment with antiretrovirals, a greater than 50% reduction in number of deaths from AIDS and a marked decrease in hospital bed occupancy.

However, despite the concrete successes achieved by The Bahamas and others, we are acutely aware that our work is far from finished. While much has already been achieved, the international community is not yet firmly on the road to truly reversing

the spread of HIV/AIDS. It is clear to us that the road ahead will require continued political will and commitment, the continued intensification of prevention efforts in tandem with treatment, care and support. We must also commit to ensuring the integration of HIV/AIDS care into primary care and community clinics to assist in facilitating universal access, combating stigma and discrimination, which remains a major obstacle in all countries, and the continued building and retention of human resource capacity in order to deliver comprehensive programmes. However, we must realize that none of this will be possible without the provision of predictable and sustainable financing for low and middle-income countries, and must commit ourselves to intensify our efforts in this regard.

Finally, there can be no prevention without care. To this end, our efforts must be augmented by the development of effective microbicides to assist in prevention, as well as new and effective drugs for therapy, and ultimately an effective and affordable vaccine.

Mr. President,

The Commonwealth of The Bahamas firmly believes that continued efforts on the part of all stakeholders will enable the international community to make meaningful progress in the fight against HIV/AIDS. We must stay the course and seize the opportunities that exist presently to reverse this devastating epidemic. For its part, The Bahamas remains committed to the fight, and will work with its partners in the international community to bring an end to this global scourge.

Thank you.