



**PERMANENT MISSION OF SINGAPORE
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

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STATEMENT

BY

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REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE**

**2006 HIGH LEVEL MEETING ON AIDS
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Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1 Every corner of the world has been touched by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The devastation experienced by millions of families and communities, and the economic, social, human and developmental costs of this disease are plain to see.

2 The local epidemic in Singapore is but one small component of the global AIDS pandemic. Since 1985, when the first case of HIV/AIDS was reported in Singapore, more than 2,500 individuals have been diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. The prevalence of this disease in Singapore is still low, at 0.1-0.2%, but each year, we are seeing increasing numbers of patients who are newly diagnosed with HIV/AIDS.

3 With rapid globalization, increased traveling and a new generation of young Singaporeans approaching sexual maturity and becoming prone to high risk sexual behaviour, it is essential for us to continue devoting attention and resources to scale up and intensify prevention and control of this disease through a broad and inclusive approach.

4 HIV/AIDS prevention education is a cornerstone of our control programme. Health education programmes are targeted at the general population, as well as tailored for specific high-risk groups such as sex workers and MSM. Education programmes have also been implemented in schools to reach out to teenagers and youths as they are a vulnerable group. In order to ensure that the impact of these education programmes is not diminished over time, Singapore will continue to develop and intensify appropriate and innovative strategies to positively influence behaviour.

5 Singapore has also undertaken several new initiatives to assist in the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS, and to enhance the care and support of those infected.

6 Mother-to-child transmission is almost entirely preventable with early detection and antiretroviral treatment. In December 2004, the Singapore government spearheaded an intensified voluntary antenatal HIV screening programme. Pregnant women are now routinely offered HIV testing together with other antenatal tests. By making such testing a standard of care, we have achieved great success, with about 98-99% of pregnant mothers in our public hospitals being tested for HIV, compared with a less than 30% take-up rate previously. Since this intensified programme began, we have not had any reports of children born with HIV infection.

7 We also recognize that there is a pressing need to address society's prejudice against those living with HIV/AIDS. This is not an easy task because of deep-rooted cultural and religious beliefs, but we are working actively towards reducing stigma and discrimination through education of our community and our healthcare workers.

8 There are more than 40 million people worldwide living with HIV/AIDS today. The toll that HIV/AIDS exacts on employees, worker productivity and economic growth cannot be denied.

9 We believe that it makes business sense for businesses to become actively involved in the fight against AIDS. In November 2005, the AIDS Business Alliance was set up in Singapore to champion HIV/AIDS education for workers and to advocate for a supportive and non-discriminatory working environment for HIV infected workers. The Alliance was formed by a group of businesses, and has representation from local and multinational companies and employees' and employers' unions. Together with the Alliance, the government has launched an educational programme called "RESPECT", or *Rallying Employers to Support the Prevention, Education and Control of STI/HIV/AIDS*. This is a programme specially developed for the local workplace setting, which aims to educate workers on AIDS prevention and which will fight discrimination against HIV positive workers at the workplace.

10 Our control measures will not work if people do not engage in frank, open discussions about the disease and about sexual behaviors. As a conservative Asian society, this has been traditionally difficult for us, but we will continue towards this goal.

11 Mr. President, we are encouraged by the efforts of the global community in achieving important progress in the areas of funding and expanding the level of access to HIV prevention, treatment and care. However, our fight against this disease is far from over. Continued political commitment, strong leadership and the concerted efforts of the public and private sectors, together with civil society, communities affected by HIV/AIDS and other stakeholders, are essential to sustain the headway we have made against this pandemic.

Thank you.

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