

SWEDEN



STATEMENT

by

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- CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY -

Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since the adoption of the landmark Declaration of Commitment, 20 to 25 million people have become infected with HIV and 15 million people have died of AIDS. Even if some progress has been made, we have fallen short on our efforts to generate a sufficient response to the pandemic and to fully implement the Declaration of Commitment.

The excellent report by the Secretary-General shows clearly that a number of gaps must be filled and barriers must be removed. Our response to the pandemic requires the courage to address also the difficult issues.

We have to do more, better and faster. We must acknowledge that the fight on HIV/AIDS will never be won with easy slogans. We must recognize that HIV/AIDS is something that we will continue to live with. The emergency response has to be combined with long term commitments.

Mr. President. Let me focus on a few important points:

Silence and denial causes stigma and discrimination and undermine prevention, treatment and care efforts. The human rights efforts still remain far too weak and fragmented. We need to strengthen and ensure compliance with human rights at large and ensure that policies, laws and regulations are in place.

Prevention is the key. Our preventive efforts must be built on evidence, be human rights based and fully recognize the complexity of the challenge ahead. Voluntary counseling and testing should also be a critical part of our efforts. The recent UNAIDS policy paper "Intensifying HIV prevention" is a corner stone for our continued efforts. But a good policy is not enough. Words must be transformed into deeds. This was the topic of a recent meeting in Stockholm organized by the Swedish Government together with UNAIDS.

Comprehensive population based prevention efforts must be the mainstay of our work. But we must also focus on vulnerable groups: men who have sex with men, men and women involved in prostitution, injecting and other drug users, prisoners, mobile populations, migrant laborers and others that are difficult to reach with information, for instance. These groups need to be specially targeted by prevention efforts in an empowering and non-discriminating manner.

Poor people are the ones least equipped to cope with the effects of the epidemic. They carry the heaviest burden of AIDS, which also drives countries and people further into poverty. To reverse the spread of HIV, we need to address poverty.

A comprehensive and sustainable response is a must in the fight against HIV/AIDS, from prevention and testing to treatment and impact mitigation. The term "universal access" has to refer to prevention as well as treatment. Without effective preventive strategies, universal access to treatment will be impossible to reach.

Long term commitment and predictable financing for new innovative strategies to develop effective and safe vaccines and remedies is another critical part of a comprehensive approach.

The sexual and reproductive health and rights of individuals has to be strengthened. The link between sexual and reproductive health and rights and the fight against HIV/AIDS is fundamental. Young people must have access to comprehensive sexuality education and youth friendly confidential sexual and reproductive health services. Promotion of male and female condoms use must be a priority.

We must ensure that women, girls, men and boys enjoy equal rights and opportunities. Women are key in the fight against the pandemic. They carry the main burden. We must acknowledge the gender-based power structures as a global problem and a critical barrier for preventive efforts. Many men and boys must change their views on masculinity, gender equality and sexuality.

Mr. President, today leaders of the world have gathered here in New York to reinforce our commitment to fighting the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

We must show leadership to be able to go forward from here. We must commit more resources on a sustainable basis to meet the needs identified in the Secretary-General's report. We must acknowledge that the contributions of civil society actors, in particular people living with HIV/AIDS, are vital. We must fight all the harmful and prejudiced attitudes within our societies. Only then can we win the fight against the pandemic.

Mr. President, I thank you.