



**STATEMENT**

**ON BEHALF OF THE RIO GROUP**

**BY**

**THE HONOURABLE LESLIE RAMSAMMY**  
**MINISTER OF HEALTH**  
**REPUBLIC OF GUYANA**

**AT THE HIGH-LEVEL MEETING ON HIV/AIDS**  
**UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS**

**ON JUNE 02, 2006**

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**Mr. President,**

**The Members of the Rio Group, on whose behalf it is my honour to speak, welcome the opportunity of this High-Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS to renew our commitment to the global struggle against this pandemic. We are fully committed to universal access to prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010.**

**Progress has been made since 2001. Advances have been noted in financing for HIV programmes in some developing countries. The establishment of the Global Fund for HIV, Tuberculosis and Malaria is contributing positively to global efforts. Access to anti-retroviral therapy has increased and successes are being increasingly recorded in the area of prevention. What is clear, however, is that the progress made thus far has not been enough to turn the tide of the disease.**

**As the report of the Secretary-General points out, in 2005 there were more new infections and more AIDS deaths than ever before. The Rio Group shares his conclusion that unless the HIV/AIDS response become substantially stronger, more strategic and better coordinated, the world will not achieve the 2010 targets of the Declaration of Commitment. We therefore call for an urgent scale up of the global response to a level commensurate with the challenge posed by this scourge.**

**Mr. President, Rio Group countries are making substantial efforts to counter the spread of HIV/AIDS, despite limited access to external resources for this purpose. However, the experience with HIV/AIDS is not uniform among our countries. Several have developed significant capacities in combating the pandemic and some have been successful in containing, if not reversing, it. Some continue to struggle with prevalence rates above 1%. Still, several of our countries were included among the eighteen countries that met the 3 x 5 targets at the end of 2005. Out of our experiences on the ground, Rio Group countries are drawing important lessons in the fight against HIV/AIDS and many engage in active programmes of South-South cooperation both within the region and further afield.**

**On behalf of the Rio Group, allow me to outline some of our concerns in the fight against HIV/AIDS:**

- Rio Group countries have concerns about funding arrangements for countries of Latin American and the Caribbean. For example, while the Global Fund for HIV, Tuberculosis and Malaria is intended to support the efforts of low and middle-income countries to dealing with the pandemic, we worry that its doors remain closed to the majority of countries from the region. The countries of the Rio Group**

call for solidarity, not exclusion. We are concerned that after more than thirty-five years, most of the developed countries have not met the goal of 0.7% of the GNP targeted towards ODA.

- We support the Three Ones Initiative, but we have concerns that international partners do not always promote national stewardship of the fight against HIV/AIDS by working under a national HIV/AIDS framework.
- Poverty remains a major obstacle in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Debt relief is necessary for many of our countries if we are to reduce poverty but the process remains slow and pre-conditions impede rapid progress
- Universal access to prevention, treatment care and support is stymied by lack of access to affordable drugs, medical and other supplies. While first-line drugs have become affordable, second-line drugs, laboratory reagents and other supplies remain unaffordable. We support initiatives to ensure quality products, but such initiatives must not serve as a guise for restricting access to affordable commodities and for trade protection. In this regard, we commend those countries that have played a pioneering role in promoting accessibility to affordable anti-retroviral drugs. The Rio Group calls for global efforts to remove barriers such as pricing policies, tariff arrangements and regulatory policies that essentially make the TRIPS meaningless. The Rio Group reaffirms its firm commitment to the Doha Declaration on TRIPS and Public Health.
- Many of our countries are constrained by human resource difficulties. Migration of health personnel, including nurses, to developed countries is impeding effective response to HIV/AIDS at the national level. A global effort to mitigate this constraint is needed now. Similarly, efforts need to be intensified to facilitate transfer of the requisite technology and to support the development of health infrastructure to strengthen the national HIV/AIDS response.
- While acknowledging development of technologies in the past twenty-five years, we are concerned about the slow progress in development of a vaccine and a microbicide and urge heightened efforts in this regard.
- The Rio Group remains firmly committed to the full realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, and considers this to be an essential element in the global response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, including in the areas of prevention, treatment, care and support.

- **We are concerned about the increasing impact of HIV/AIDS on women, young girls and children. We call for a stronger commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of women, full respect for the rights of women, young girls and children, and their protection from all forms of violence.**
- **Addressing stigma and discrimination is fundamental to the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic. However, even as the world proclaims its commitment to fight against stigma and discrimination, some countries require HIV/AIDS testing as a condition for entry, breaching the right to free movement.**
- **Our Group remains concerned about the high HIV prevalence rates in certain vulnerable groups within our societies and we are committed to addressing this situation, including through ensuring full access to all AIDS services, and the protection of the rights of individuals in these groups.**

**Mr. President,**

**To be successful in the battle against HIV/AIDS the world needs a comprehensive approach involving all stakeholders and addressing all dimensions of this challenge. From the Rio Group perspective such an approach would be incomplete if it fails to fully address the concerns to which I have alluded.**

**I thank you.**