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**THE PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

Statement by
H.E. Mr. Andreas Mavroyiannis
Ambassador, Permanent Representative
of the Republic of Cyprus
to the United Nations

at the High-Level Meeting
on HIV/AIDS
of the 60th Session
of the United Nations General Assembly

New York, 2 June 2006

Mr. President,

Allow me at the outset to note that Cyprus is fully represented by the Statement of Austria, delivered earlier, on behalf of the EU.

Five years after the 2001 Special Session, the collective effort of the international community to halt the spread of the pandemic of HIV/AIDS, stands at a crucial juncture.

We have gathered here today to take stock of the achievements and to review the results of our efforts in meeting the goals of the Declaration of Commitment. While much has been accomplished the epidemic continues to defeat our global response. The year 2005 was marked by more infections and AIDS deaths than ever before.

It is now time for bold action. We have come together to renew our commitment to the full implementation of the 2001 Declaration on AIDS and to the Millennium Development Goal of halting and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS. In this fight, strong political leadership is essential. According to the UN Secretary General, success will require unprecedented willingness on the part of all actors in their global response. A comprehensive and an all inclusive approach is needed, one able to tackle obstacles and build long-term and sustainable strategies.

In this regard, we welcome the Report of the Secretary General "Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS: five years later". The statistics contained in it speak for themselves and are most alarming, especially those regarding women, young people and children. We note with concern the increasing feminization of the epidemic. We are equally concerned that more than 95% of infected people are in developing countries, a major detrimental factor for the Millennium Development Goals of reducing poverty, hunger and child mortality.

However, important progress has been made in the fight against AIDS since 2001, in particular in the fields of greater resources, stronger national policy frameworks, and wider access to treatment and prevention services. These positive developments provide a solid basis for stepping up global response, fully and comprehensively. In this respect, the work carried out by the UN Secretariat, the Specialized Agencies and Organizations and in particular that of UNAIDS at the country level towards universal access, is highly commendable.

Much more, however, needs to be done, especially in the fields of sustainable financial resources and prevention. Access to prevention, treatment and care is a key factor in halting the epidemic that should be promoted by removing legal and regulatory barriers. Human rights and fundamental freedoms and gender equality are indispensable ingredients in the combat against AIDS that must be secured and protected. Equally important are access to life-saving drugs and prevention tools.

In Cyprus, HIV/AIDS infection has been maintained at a very low prevalence rate of 0.1% of its population. Since 1986, when AIDS made its first appearance in Cyprus, the Government has made the issue one of its highest priorities. As of then, we set up time-bound plans of action against the epidemic, which are systematically updated and adjusted based on new knowledge and experience and technological advances. Cyprus's policy is formulated in line with EU positions and in close coordination with its EU and other international partners. Educational programs about AIDS have been incorporated in school curricula, aiming at building defenses among the young people to decrease their risk of being infected. The National Aids Committee of Cyprus, comprised of all competent governmental authorities and departments as well as private institutions and NGOs and the relevant specialized agency responsible for policy on this issue, actively promote inclusion of all sectors of society in promoting HIV public awareness especially among high-risk groups and alleviating stigma and providing support. Data patterns regarding HIV infection in Cyprus present a stable and consistent trend. Nevertheless, the Government continues to strictly monitor the situation by conducting studies to assess the threat posed by factors intimately linked to the virus, such as sexual behaviour and drug abuse. Cyprus has already put in place a strategic plan for 2004-2008 against AIDS which sets out specific targets and goals engaging in their achievement in all societal and governmental sectors. In order to secure the rights of AIDS patients and eliminate stigma and discrimination, we have removed any legal or regulatory barriers that inhibit access to prevention, treatment, care and support.

Mr. President,

Today, Cyprus joins its voice with the rest of the international community in renewing the promise to work with diligence and determination, globally, regionally and nationally at the highest political level, in order to achieve the commitments set out in the 2001 Declaration of Commitment and the Millennium Development Goal of ultimately realizing our common objective of halting and reversing the spread of AIDS.

The Political Declaration which will be adopted tonight sends a strong message across the globe that the international community is determined and united to do everything possible for a world free of HIV/AIDS