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STATEMENT

BY

H.E. MR. OSCAR FERNANDES
HON'BLE MINISTER OF STATE
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
AND
LEADER OF THE INDIAN DELEGATION

on

Building an HIV-Resilient Nation:
Accelerated and Coordinated National Response
to the HIV Epidemic

at the

**HIGH LEVEL MEETING ON HIV/AIDS
UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

NEW YORK

02 JUNE 2006

Mr. President,
Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates!

I am pleased to be here today and would like to thank the Secretary-General for the excellent arrangements and the documentation.

India is a country with over a billion people, of whom 400 million are below the age of 30 years. A young, mobile population and the rapid economic and social transformation that India is undergoing add to the complexity of the epidemic. Today, over 5.2 million people are living with HIV in India.

Recognizing the gravity of the problem, the National Common Minimum Programme of my Government has made a strong commitment to reverse its further progression. My Prime Minister is leading the efforts by chairing the National Council on AIDS which consists of 31 cabinet Ministers, state Chief Ministers and leading civil society representatives. Our political commitment to containing HIV/AIDS is further demonstrated with the constitution of the Parliamentary and state Legislators fora where elected representatives, cutting across party lines, have voluntarily agreed to be members.

We are now involving the local self-governments at the village level through the elected representatives numbering 3 million including one million women.

India is making significant progress in addressing the challenges posed by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Integrated with the National Rural Health Mission, our flagship programme for addressing inequities in accessing health services in rural areas, the HIV/AIDS strategy seeks to balance prevention with the continuum of care and treatment. With prevention as the key, our strategy focuses on expanding access to preventive services.

We are also expanding access to treatment from the current level of 30,000 to 100,000 persons, including 10,000 children with pediatric formulation of ART during this year itself.

The soundness of our strategy has been vindicated by data from the high prevalent state of Tamil Nadu, indicating a decisive downward trend among the age group of 15-24 years and a stabilization of the epidemic. Yet we cannot be complacent. We are mindful of the need to intensify our efforts quickly and to fight stigma and discrimination.

Recognizing the seriousness of this problem, we are close to finalizing a law that aims to provide extensive protection to women, children and people living with AIDS. We believe that such a rights based approach is necessary in our struggle against HIV/AIDS.

Mr. President,

India is a source of affordable essential drugs several countries in the developing world. Indian pharmaceutical companies have been able to obtain US FDA approval for over 14 drugs, which will further ease the availability of affordable drugs. India reaffirms its fullest commitment and solidarity to the global fight against HIV and AIDS.

Thank you, Mr. President.