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Permanent Mission
of the Russian Federation
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136E 67th Street
New York, NY 10021

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STATEMENT
by H.E. Mr. Michail Zurabov,
Minister of Health and Social Development of the Russian Federation,
at the High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly
on the progress achieved in realizing the targets set out in the
2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS

2 June 2006

Mr. Chairman,

HIV/AIDS remains one of the most serious challenges of today – it deprives millions of people in many regions of the world of hopes to achieve adequate living conditions and places a huge burden on less developed countries impeding their socio-economic development.

The epidemic that annually takes more than 3 millions of human lives, undermines decades of progress in public health, affects human development - a key factor of sustainable development, and therefore, poses risk and threat to security in the world.

In the context of growing globalization no country in the world is left unaffected by the fatal epidemic. Its scope in Africa and Caribbean countries is dolefully known. In recent years, the epidemic has been also rapidly expanding in other regions, including Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

In this connection, a broader exchange of experience and elaboration of joint regional approaches to fight the epidemic become of critical importance. These were the major issues discussed at the first Conference on HIV/AIDS in the countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia on 15-17 May 2006 in Moscow, where participants examined possible ways to consolidate and coordinate joint efforts to fight HIV/AIDS in the region.

Clearly aware of the scope of the HIV/AIDS threat and its potential consequences, the Government of the Russian Federation gives this issue priority attention. Federal project "Health" provides with significant funds for prevention, diagnostics and treatment of people affected by HIV and viral hepatitis comprising 3.1 bln rubles (more than \$100 mln) for the current year. Funding should be multiplied by 2.5 in 2007. The measures undertaken will allow ensuring antiretroviral treatment for all those who need it.

Furthermore, additional funds were allocated for viral hepatitis B vaccination of 25 mln children and adults of reproductive age.

The fundamentals of our state policy and strategy on HIV/AIDS are identified in the federal act "On prevention of the infection caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV infection)" adopted in 1995.

Based on the provisions of this law, main principles of Russia's national policy on HIV/AIDS were set as follows:

- to focus HIV strategy primarily on prevention of HIV infection among all groups of the society, development and manufacturing of effective means of diagnostics, treatment and specific prevention of HIV infection;
- to reduce the spread of HIV infection among population, increase the maximum age and standards of life of people living with HIV;
- to minimize social, economic and political consequences of HIV/AIDS epidemic in the Russian Federation;
- to provide with access to diagnostics and treatment of HIV infection for all groups of the society.

A Country Coordination Committee was established in Russia to coordinate the implementation of projects financed by grants of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Under the aegis of the Ministry of Health and Social Development, Coordinating council on HIV infection was set up, which provides for the participation, along with experts from governmental agencies, of representatives of civil society.

Efforts are being made to guarantee affordable price on antiretroviral medications. The main emphasis is placed in this regard on negotiating acceptable price on patented medicines with maker companies. Taking into account that Russian pharmaceutical industries apply now proper GMP (good manufacture practices), transfer of antiretroviral production in Russia could in the near future significantly reduce the cost of the medicines.

Yet, despite the positive trends in our country, we still have a long way to go to ensure the quantum leap in the fight against the epidemic. The entire complex of issues related to HIV/AIDS has been recently analyzed at the meeting of the Presidium of the State Council of the Russian Federation under the chairmanship of President V.Putin. The outcomes of the meeting, which gave a political evaluation on the problem, direct toward the further improvement of legislation in this area, development of long-term strategy to fight the epidemic and overcome its consequences, organizing more accurate monitoring of the HIV/AIDS situation, consistent education and broader partnership with civil society.

Thus, we can state with full responsibility that at national level, we are moving in accordance with the targets set out in the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS.

Mr. Chairman,

Today's meeting can be, without exaggeration, called a turning point in the global response to HIV/AIDS.

The historic "Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS" of 2001 established comprehensive framework of strategic approach to HIV/AIDS and set the targets to fight the threat of the epidemic on medium- and long-term perspective.

Today we have to give an assessment of the effectiveness of measures on implementing the first set of targets laid down in the Declaration.

We believe that the level of international cooperation on the fight of HIV/AIDS deserves appreciation. At the same time, we think that the full and timely realization of the targets of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS requires considerable scaling up of intersectoral comprehensive approach to HIV/AIDS, increased coordination of efforts of all countries and regions of the world, and creation of additional opportunities for effective participation of civil society representatives in the process.

It is axiomatic that to successfully fight HIV/AIDS, we need coordinated and target-oriented actions at all levels – international, regional, subregional, and finally, local community level. The experience of many regions including our own experience of cooperation within CIS region,

demonstrates that regional, subregional and local community levels are of major importance - here we have opportunities to work out special targeted measures.

Among the most important components of the fight against HIV/AIDS is education. We see a significant potential in increasing cooperation between the UN agencies in the development of standard educational programmes and their adjustment to certain countries and regions as well as in training of qualified personnel of teachers and instructors.

It is also important to develop and introduce special programs directed toward respective groups of drug users, commercial sex workers, migrants and youth.

Social and legal aspects of the HIV/AIDS problem are of no less significance. It is not for the first time that we propose to consider the establishment of agreed leading principles that would serve as a guiding tool for further development at the national level legal base for non-discriminatory approach to all categories of vulnerable people.

Strengthening cooperation with partners outside the UN system is also one of the priorities. The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria takes the first place in this regard.

We welcome the activities of the Fund and believe that it is essential to ensure its adequate replenishment, so that it could effectively implement its functions as a major financial mechanism in the fight against the three global diseases, as it was decided in 2001. In addition to its previous commitments, the Russian Federation decided to increase its contribution to the Fund up to \$40 mln. We are now examining the ways to further broaden Russia's participation in the Fund as a donor country.

Mr. Chairman,

The Russian Federation consistently supports the active development of international cooperation to effectively respond to HIV/AIDS threat at all levels. Fight against infectious diseases, including HIV/AIDS, is one of the priority themes of Russia's presidency at the G-8 Summit in St. Petersburg this year.

As part of the preparations, over a month ago a meeting of the G-8 Ministers of Health was held in Moscow. The participants of the meeting expressed deep concern of the continuous spread of such infections, as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.

The ministers discussed the importance of implementing the initiatives on ensuring the universal access to prevention of HIV/AIDS, treatment and care and assured to take all the efforts in the sphere of public health to contribute to the implementation of the commitments made in the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS as well as in the Millennium Declaration.

As already mentioned above, the coordination of efforts at regional level is one of the most important elements in achieving the successful implementation of the global HIV/AIDS response.

Aware of its role and place in the fight against HIV/AIDS in the region of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Russia considers this task as a priority today. However, we view leadership as, first of all, responsibility and intend to broaden technical, financial and organizational support to the countries in their efforts to fight AIDS.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I would like to express hope that the political commitment demonstrated at this meeting, supported by practical measures that take into account the accumulated experience of 5 past years and direct toward the improvement of quality of international cooperation in the interest of implementation of the agreed targets, will open a new important page in the history of the global partnership against HIV/AIDS.

Thank you.