



ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

PERMANENT MISSION OF ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES TO THE UNITED NATIONS
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STATEMENT

BY

The Hon. Douglas Slater
Minister of Health and the Environment

AT

THE UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL SESSION ON HIV/AIDS

UNITED NATIONS
New York

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Please check against delivery

Mr. President, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, as part of the PANCAP group, fully supports the earlier statement given by the Hon. Prime Minister of St. Kitts and Nevis on behalf of CARICOM. My country has been sorely affected by the pandemic known as HIV/AIDS. Extensive resources have been invested in our efforts to respond appropriately to the myriad challenges posed by the disease. We have done so in recognition of the importance of the treatment and control of this pandemic to our holistic development. The allocation of substantial resources to HIV/AIDS, comes at a time when small developing countries such as ours have had to confront other major developmental challenges brought about by global events beyond our control, such as 9/11 and other acts of global terrorism. Our development and our standard of living have also been negatively impacted by WTO rulings that threaten to destroy our banana industry and other agricultural exports that constitute the major proportion of our foreign earnings. The vulnerability of other service sectors, for example the tourism industry and our fledging offshore finance industry taken together with the global increase in commodity prices as well as the decrease in official development assistance because of our assessed "fair" economic status have all combined to present us with a task of significant magnitude.

Nevertheless we have accepted our responsibility and the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has made this issue a priority. We have continued to develop and implement programmes in response to the pandemic. A new fully staffed HIV Unit is currently in place; a national AIDS Council co-chaired by the Hon. Prime Minister and myself has been set up with strong representation from other Line Ministries. Significant financial resources have been allocated to the programme including a

World Bank loan to complement finances from other partners such as the Global Fund and DFID through the OECS – Regional program.

These efforts are notable considering our inherent financial limitations and the shortage of specially trained appropriate human resources to provide the required expertise necessary for effective and efficient implementation of activities to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS. I stress, Mr. President, that the Government is committed to working closely with civil society; it is our firm belief that the Private Sector needs to be fully engaged in the ongoing struggle. Business relies on a healthy, vibrant workforce and it can benefit no-one if our people, in particular our youth, are sidelined by the stigma of HIV/AIDS.

Two years ago, we implemented a programme of treatment free of cost to all persons infected with the HIV. This has resulted in a notable decrease in the mortality of infected persons and also in a significant improvement in the quality of life of those on treatment. The number of new infected persons however continues to be of concern and we recognize that much work is still needed to address the issues related to prevention, as well as the matter of stigma and discrimination meted out to infected persons and their relatives. This is arguably the most challenging aspect of the fight in our small community where virtually everyone is known to everyone else. We remain, however, resolute and we will require the continued support of our developmental partners to understand and to respond to our special circumstances of scarce financial and human resources.

Our relationship with donor agencies and other partners must be an enabling one with full recognition of the challenges, but also of the implications of failure. The world has been described as a global village: technological development; trade and other relationships have resulted in increased interaction of the peoples of the world, a factor facilitating the spread of the HIV. It is our hope that this same interaction will be used to ensure that our united efforts guarantee that our collective human intellect and goodwill to each other overcome the impact of the destructive consequences brought about by HIV/AIDS.

The Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines is cognisant of the need to continue to respond energetically and effectively to this challenge but we find it difficult to do so without the help of our global partners. We are indeed grateful for the assistance received thus far from those who have responded; we encourage their continued and expanded support. We, for our part, will continue to work with our regional sister countries and organizations to employ our best minds to meet the ongoing demands.

This war against HIV is one that must have the unanimous support of all UN member countries, if we are to meet the MDGs and enjoy sustainable development. It is a battle we must fight together and must win. We are ready to do our part.

I thank you.

New York

2 June 2006