



TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

PERMANENT MISSION OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO TO THE UNITED NATIONS
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STATEMENT

BY

**THE HONOURABLE RODGER SAMUEL, MP
MINISTER OF STATE
OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER**

AT

**THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH-LEVEL MEETING TO REVIEW
THE PROGRESS ACHIEVED IN REALIZING THE 2001
DECLARATION OF COMMITMENT ON HIV/AIDS AND THE
2006 POLITICAL DECLARATION ON HIV/AIDS**

JUNE 08 – 10, 2011

UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS

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Mr. President,

At the outset, Trinidad and Tobago wishes to align itself with the statement made by Dr. the Honourable Denzil Douglas, Prime Minister of Saint Kitts and Nevis on behalf of the Caribbean Community.

In 2001, and again in 2006, members of this august body came together in a spirit of solidarity to demonstrate our commitment to international measures aimed at combating the pandemic of HIV/AIDS. The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago was proud to be a part of the process which led to the adoption of the Declarations on both occasions.

Nevertheless, the adoption of declarations, resolutions or treaties on any subject is useless if there is no corresponding commitment to implement the provisions of these instruments. Consequently, we find the convening of this meeting to be not only timely, but also critical coming only a few days after the 30th anniversary of the commemoration of the first diagnosis of the disease. This High-level Meeting allows the international community the opportunity to assess the effectiveness of the measures we agreed upon and also to devise new means to achieve our objective.

Within the confines of our limited resources, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago continues to do its part to discharge its commitments under the Declarations adopted by this Assembly, as well as those hemispheric initiatives geared towards bringing relief to our citizens who are affected by HIV/AIDS. We also continue to promote awareness of the importance of preventative measures aimed at curbing the spread of the disease. For us, this matter is of high priority, and consequently, this responsibility has been placed under the Office of the Prime Minister, which oversees Trinidad and Tobago's response to this epidemic.

Mr. President,

Trinidad and Tobago is leading an active campaign in the fight against HIV and AIDS at all levels. Our efforts are aimed at ensuring that there is universal access to treatment, care and support, as well as to insulate future generations from HIV and AIDS.

Allow me to enumerate a few of the initiatives developed by Trinidad and Tobago in the fight against HIV/AIDS. In 2003, we formulated a strategic framework in the context of a national response to HIV/AIDS. A National HIV and AIDS Strategic Plan (NSP) 2004-2008 was also developed to direct the national response and set the framework for the coordination of activities to reduce the incidence of HIV and mitigate the negative effects of the epidemic.

The National Strategic Plan has five priority areas, namely prevention; treatment, care and support for people living with HIV; advocacy and human rights; surveillance and research; and programme management, coordination and evaluation.

Mr. President,

In Trinidad and Tobago, we have achieved some successes in our battle against this disease. There is universal access to HIV testing. For example, in the area of prevention, 97% of pregnant women have been tested for HIV. Additionally, the provision of free antiretroviral medication has reduced the number of HIV-exposed infants testing positive to 7% from 11% in 2002. In Tobago, in particular, I am pleased to indicate that in 2009 there were no recorded cases of infants born HIV positive. Trinidad and Tobago has also adopted the elimination initiative which seeks to eliminate the transmission of HIV from Mother to Child by 2015.

Nationally, there has been an increase in awareness of the modes of transmission of HIV in 77% of the general population. HIV programmes have also been expanded into the workplace, both in public and private institutions in accordance with our National Workplace Policy on HIV and AIDS. Further, 52 faith-based and civil society organizations have been funded to develop education and counseling programmes in communities.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago, **Mr. President**, provides free antiretroviral drugs to all persons living with HIV and AIDS. At the end of 2010, 6800 persons (adults and children) living with HIV were accessing treatment and care services across the country at dedicated sites. 67.2% of them are accessing antiretroviral treatment. In 2009, 558 attendees received training related to caring for people living with HIV so as to increase the number of health personnel trained in this area.

Also noteworthy is that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is undertaking a legislative review of the impact of national laws on people living with HIV. In addition, national legislation is being drafted to regulate the reporting of HIV cases using surveillance best practice that protects patient confidentiality. The Government also remains committed to a review of all measures relating to the prevention of HIV and the treatment of those living with HIV and AIDS. To this end, a draft national policy on HIV and AIDS is now awaiting the approval of the Trinidad and Tobago Cabinet.

Mr. President,

Coupled with our national efforts, we recognize the importance of partnerships at the regional and global levels to confront the challenges posed by HIV/AIDS. In this context, I acknowledge the Caribbean Regional Strategic Framework, in which Trinidad and Tobago has adapted the stated 25% reduction in new cases which translates to a reduction from 1400 to 1100 cases by 2013. We also remain committed to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS). In this regard, we are dedicated to halt the prevalence of HIV among young people. Our aim is to halve our number of new cases from a 2008 baseline by 2015 which, in Trinidad and Tobago translates to 700 cases.

Mr. President,

In this fight, we must recognize that stigma and discrimination substantively impact all stages of our efforts to treat people living with HIV and to eliminate the spread of the virus. Stigma and discrimination could lead to the infringement of the human rights of those living with HIV/AIDS. Consequently, we have undertaken initiatives to address this issue and will continue to do so. In this context, Trinidad and Tobago acknowledges the assistance received bilaterally from the United States through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), in collaboration with Centres for Disease Control, to shift HIV testing to non-governmental organizations. This would increase access to services and aid in efforts to further reduce stigma and discrimination. We are also in the process of ensuring that HIV testing becomes an integral part of the primary healthcare system. Moreover, a Human Rights Desk designed to investigate discrimination against people living with HIV, has been established.

Mr. President,

Trinidad and Tobago has made significant progress but there is still much work to be done. The Government reaffirms its commitment to working with all actors at the national level, including non-governmental organizations, civil society, youth organizations and the private sector to continue investing and to intensify efforts to eliminate HIV. The composition of our delegation to this meeting which includes representatives of a number of these groups is evidence of this commitment.

Mr. President,

Trinidad and Tobago will remain actively engaged at the regional and international levels on this matter. We therefore wish to reaffirm our commitment to continue to work with UNAIDS, PANCAP, the WHO and other entities toward the achievement of a world free of HIV/AIDS.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago will continue to lend its support to the United Nations as it continues to play a vanguard role in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

The moment has come to renew our commitment and intensify our efforts in the fight against this global pandemic.

Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We agree with adage '*HIV Is Everyone's Business*'...Let's get down to it.

I thank you.