



STATEMENT BY

**THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
H.E. MR. JAN ELIASSON**

AT

THE INTERFAITH SERVICE ON HIV AND AIDS

**ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH
NEW YORK
30 MAY 2006**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, friends

Earlier this month, I visited Nairobi, Kenya. While I was there I went to the Kibera slum area. Near the end of my visit, I asked the community to tell me their main concern and top priority for action. From all corners the response came: HIV and AIDS.

It is my responsibility as President of the United Nations General Assembly to represent the views of the Assembly's 191 Member States. It is also my responsibility to ensure that the Assembly does something substantial about the realities of life for millions of our fellow human beings, particularly the poorest and most vulnerable. Remember the first three words of the UN Charter: 'We the peoples'.

Over the next three days, the General Assembly has an opportunity to show the world that it has heard the resounding call for action on HIV and AIDS, and that it will act on it.

And act we must. How can it be that 25 years into this pandemic, the rate of new infections is such that around 500 men, women and children – half of them under the age of 24 – will have been newly infected before we leave tonight?

That statistic – and others like it – remind us that the international response to AIDS has been woefully slow. I believe it is one of the scars on the global conscience of our generation. I know we cannot turn back the clock. But we can ensure that when historians look back at the way the world dealt with AIDS, they will recognize that 2006 was the year we finally stepped up to the plate – the year we began to 'keep the promise'.

There are strong grounds for hope. Much more money is being invested in the fight against AIDS, though it is still not enough. From the global level to the country level, those with something to bring to the fight are beginning to work together better. More than ever before, we know what needs to be done, and we have the tools to do it. In some countries, infection rates have begun to fall. And last year, thanks to expanded access to treatment, 250,000 to 350,000 of our fellow human beings' lives were saved. That's over two hundred places of worship like the one we are in tonight full of people who are still living. Rarely has the phrase 'make a difference' been more meaningful to me.

But the challenge now is to ensure that this progress is a springboard, not a plateau. The United Nations and its Member States need to hear their citizens telling them that more must be done. 'We the peoples' are the first three words of the UN Charter. You need to be heard. The four out of five people who are at risk of HIV infection but have no access to any form of prevention need to be heard. And the nearly 6 million people who need treatment today but have no access must make their voices heard.

Civil society, and faith-based organizations, have an indispensable role in the fight against this pandemic, whether in the field or at the UN podium. That is why I am so pleased and grateful that there will be so many of you in the United Nations over the next three days, and so many opportunities for you to speak. Your presence does not guarantee the outcome we need, but without you we could not succeed.

We – all of us – have three days to ensure that the world makes the commitments that will turn the tide of this pandemic once and for all. My

call to you all is this: help us get the commitments we need. Then go back to your communities and turn commitments into action, with the will of the world behind you. In short: help us make the promise, and make us keep it.

And remember the word ‘together’ is stronger than the word ‘alone’, both as concept, notion and reality. Let us prove that international solidarity makes the difference between life and death for millions of men, women and children affected by HIV around the world – our common world.