

8 June 2011

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Joseph Deiss,
President of the 65th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Opening of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on
HIV/AIDS**

Heads of State and Government,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We must succeed. We must win our battle against AIDS.

Here in this room, a decade ago, the community of nations, meeting in this General Assembly, made history by adopting an ambitious declaration, accompanied by goals and a timeline for reversing the epidemic, at a time when the situation seemed hopeless. And five years ago, in 2006, by promising universal access to prevention and treatment of the virus, we further strengthened our will to reverse the epidemic.

Today, the results are there to be seen. In the past five years, worldwide, the number of people with access to treatment has increased tenfold. Millions of lives have been saved. There has been real progress in prevention, too: the number of new infections is clearly on the decline.

But it is too soon to halt our efforts and be put off by the cost of treatment and budget cuts. Ten million people still have no access to treatment and far too many men, women and children are still being infected. We have to continue to take prevention, treatment, care and support measures that are complementary and closely linked. For we now know that treatment also prevents transmission of the virus.

We have reached a critical moment in time. This High-level Meeting is a unique opportunity to reiterate our collective commitment and to step up our campaign against AIDS. I am confident that we will meet our responsibilities and that the declaration that will be adopted at the end of this Meeting will meet the challenge. I would like to thank the facilitators who have led the negotiations leading up to this day, His Excellency Mr. Gary Quinlan, Permanent Representative of Australia, and His Excellency Mr. Charles Ntwaagae, Permanent Representative of Botswana, for their continued effort. I am pleased that the hours of intense negotiations have culminated late last night in an ambitious declaration.

I believe that if we are to succeed, it is essential for our actions to be based on a broad partnership in which governments, the private sector and civil society join forces and, together, play a greater governance role in efforts to combat the virus. In that connection, the civil society hearing held

immediately before the opening of negotiations was proof of the importance of civil society in holding governments responsible for their actions, and of its essential role in fostering respect for human rights in the context of the AIDS response.

Even 30 years after the beginning of the epidemic, the stigmatization of and discrimination against persons living with the virus and vulnerable groups far too often continue to present a major obstacle to any open debate on AIDS-related issues and hinder progress. Universal access implies social justice and social inclusion. Persons living with the virus must be stakeholders in every aspect of our effort. Their experiences and their stories are essential in developing an effective strategy for combating the epidemic.

Our decisions on matters relating to trade and intellectual property rights also have an impact on our response to AIDS. It is important for all of us - countries with a long history of industrialization, emerging powers and developing countries - to ensure that multilateral negotiations in these areas are harmonized with our efforts to combat AIDS.

There is one more issue that I want to highlight. At times, the AIDS response is depicted as competing with other development and health priorities. Not so! On the contrary, there are synergies that we must maximize between the AIDS response and universal enrolment, gender equality and better health systems, to give just a few examples. Reversing the spread of AIDS is one of the Millennium Development Goals; it is also a benchmark for achievement of all the other Goals. We must take a holistic approach and integrate the response to AIDS into broader development programmes. I think that it is important for the declaration that will be adopted at the end of this High-level Meeting to take that approach. That ambitious declaration will allow us to make significant progress in many areas. This is essential.

Heads of State and Government,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the opening of this three-day Meeting, in memory of the millions of victims of the epidemic and for the sake of all the lives that we can save, I call on each of you to take responsibility for the success of the battle against AIDS.