



IRELAND

Statement by the Taoiseach,

Mr. Bertie Ahern, T.D.,

at the

High Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS

United Nations, New York

2 June 2006

Check against delivery

Mr. President,

When I stood at this podium 5 years ago, I committed the Irish Government to spend €30 million per year on the fight against AIDS. Ireland has more than lived up to the commitments I made. Through our national programme of development assistance, Irish Aid, we have spent over €250 million in the past five years.

From this year forward, I pledge that our spending on HIV and other communicable diseases will increase to at least €100 million per year.

During the past five years, over 30 million men, women and children have been infected with HIV, over 3 million have died, over 15 million children have been orphaned by AIDS.

These are dreadful statistics. Behind them lies a grim reality of pain, suffering and destitution.

What is required now is uncompromising global leadership and commitment to scaling up our efforts so as to make AIDS history.

I have committed the Irish Government to reach the UN target of spending 0.7% of GNP on official development assistance by the year 2012.

This major scaling up of the Irish Aid Programme will enable us to be at the forefront of the fight against HIV/AIDS in the years ahead.

Over the coming years, as part of our overall commitment, we will:

- double our funding to UNAIDS to €6 million per year;
- increase our funding to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria to €20 million this year;
- continue to invest in new technologies which can prevent HIV;
- spend an additional €30 million per year on HIV in our partner countries;
- prioritise women in our programmes and spend up to 20% of the increased resources for HIV and other diseases of poverty on interventions that will benefit children.

The leadership of the United Nations is crucial to the global HIV challenge. The global progress we have made owes a great deal to the tireless commitment and leadership of the Secretary General.

The UN must continue to lead our efforts to ensure that resources are spent effectively. This means an end to the duplication of effort, a strengthening of coordination on the ground, a trustworthy system of monitoring and evaluation and a single minded focus by all on achieving results.

The fight against AIDS is a test case of UN reform in action. HIV infection does not respect borders. The European Union and its neighbouring countries are facing the fastest growing HIV

infection rates. We have invested in expanding HIV services to respond to rising infection levels in Ireland.

We need to act now. I call on the Member States of the European Union to live up to the ambitious commitments made in Dublin in 2004 and demonstrate leadership to fight this expanding epidemic.

Prevention is at the core of our HIV strategy. Our single biggest priority must be to stop new infections. With a staggering 5 million new infections in 2005, we need to spend more, build capacity and mobilise political will to reach those most at risk and most vulnerable.

Ireland is gravely concerned about the growth of the epidemic among women. Female HIV infections are on the rise in Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America. Furthermore, throughout sub-Saharan Africa, females of 15-19 years of age are four to six times more likely to be infected than their male counterparts.

A combination of HIV/AIDS and gender inequality is proving lethal for women and girls. We are committed to addressing the particular vulnerabilities of women especially in poor countries.

Progress in access to HIV treatment is evident. The price of life saving drugs has fallen dramatically since we met in 2001.

The reduced cost has facilitated a substantial increase in the number of people accessing treatment but still, only 1 in 5 people in need of treatment have access to it. We urgently need adequate

qualified staff and health supplies for the treatment of HIV and related infections such as tuberculosis.

We are working closely with the Clinton Foundation HIV/AIDS Initiative in this area and over the coming years will expand our support to them.

Children are the neglected and silent face of AIDS. Increasing numbers of children, now up to 15 million, are losing parents, guardians and siblings to AIDS.

Ireland will spend more money on children. We will work primarily with UNICEF and will allocate up to 20% of additional resources for HIV and other communicable diseases to support vulnerable children. We will work to keep mothers alive; families supported; children fed and in school; and provide treatment for those infected with HIV.

If we are to succeed in reversing this epidemic, we must also tackle the stigma and discrimination associated with it. Political leaders have to work to make our societies more open, caring, inclusive and non-judgemental.

We plan to do more to deal with this issue in Ireland. As a first step, we will have a National Campaign to combat stigma and discrimination against people infected with HIV in Ireland coinciding with World AIDS Day on 1 December this year.

Civil society has been central to Ireland's response to HIV, at home and in the countries we support. They have shown that they can reach marginalised groups; speak out for the victims; form partnerships; and do the on-the-ground work. The work of non-governmental organisations and the missionaries must be commended especially their efforts in caring for the sick and for vulnerable children.

My Government remains fully committed to being at the vanguard of the global response to HIV/AIDS. Ireland will continue to take its responsibilities seriously and to express our solidarity with the poorest people in the poorest countries who bear the brunt of this deadly disease. The fight against AIDS remains one of the greatest challenges of our generation. We will be judged by the generosity of our response and by the strength of our leadership.

Too many lives have been needlessly lost already. We must not fail the millions who look to us for help in a spirit of common humanity.

Thank you, Mr. President.