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STATEMENT DELIVERED BY

**HIS EXCELLENCY
MR. JOHN AGYEKUM KUFUOR
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF GHANA**

**AT THE HIGH-LEVEL PLENARY
MEETING ON HIV/AIDS**

NEW YORK
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Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to be addressing this important gathering. Our common destiny in today's global world dictates that, what ever threatens society in one country, should be of concern to us all. In the case of HIV/AIDS, all of us are at risk, hence, the need for this open and continuing discourse to share and review ideas and experiences and adopt common strategies to confront the menace.

The first special session on HIV/AIDS held in June 2001 acknowledged the devastating impact of the epidemic on the socio-economic development of our peoples, and adopted time-bound goals that have since guided our collective efforts to overcome this scourge.

Today, we are gathered here, to take stock of our individual and collective efforts in the fight against the pandemic, which continues unabated in its threats to the very existence of our peoples, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where the incidence of HIV/AIDS is most severe.

Global statistics indicate an increasing rate of infection and clearly call for intensive action, through the pursuit of preventive strategies and ultimately eradication of the menace. Research findings have indicated that two-thirds of the projected 45 million new HIV/AIDS infections by 2010, could be averted if proven prevention strategies are pursued vigorously. Unfortunately, so far, fewer than one in five people have access to basic HIV prevention programmes on the African continent.

Mr. Chairman, In Ghana, prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS of 3.4% has not shown any reversal over the past two years even though it is lower than rates in other countries in the West African region, where rates range between 5% to 11%. We are, therefore intensifying our pursuit of appropriate and cost-effective preventive strategies, within our limited budgetary resources, to ensure that the rate is reduced otherwise the projections are that even at the current relatively low rate, the current infected population of 600,000 will increase to 1,360,000 by year 2014, and number of orphans 236,000.

Presently, 90 percent of the 600,000 HIV cases reported in Ghana fall between the ages of 15 and 49, that is, the productive population. About 63 percent of the recorded AIDS cases are females. In Ghana, females constitute about 51 percent of our total population. They contribute significantly to productive ventures at all levels of the society, especially in petty trading and grassroots level agricultural production. Our children have not been spared.

Indeed, since the early 1990's, Ghana has taken several significant steps to fight the dreaded menace. For example, government has responded to the HIV/AIDS epidemic by facilitating a multi-sectoral approach that focuses on

mobilising human, material and financial resources in all sectors, including civil society, private sector and communities, to plan, implement and monitor appropriate prevention, care and support interventions.

To this end, we have established, directly under my office, a Ghana AIDS Commission, of which I am the Chairman. The Commission spearheads all initiatives including resource mobilization, research and capacity building aimed at overcoming the pandemic and besides its monitoring role, has been primarily engaged in promoting awareness and other preventive mechanisms to halt the spread of the deadly virus. Our achievements in the national response so far are the almost total level of awareness of the epidemic among the populace and the high level of commitment at both national, political and community leadership levels to the fight against the pandemic.

In tandem, government has established a Ghana AIDS Response Fund (GARFUND) to mobilise the necessary funds to support the work of the Ghana AIDS Commission. Since 2001, when implementation of the national response started, the Ghana AIDS Commission has disbursed \$20 million out of an IDA credit of \$25 million, to fund activities of several organizations all over the country to carry out HIV/AIDS intervention projects, at the national and community levels. These include all the 110 District Assemblies in the country, non-governmental organizations, community and faith-based organizations and private sector institutions. With their involvement, Government is presently concentrating on activities aimed at preventing new infections through behaviour change and responsible sexual behaviour, particularly among the target group-the youth.

Also, in the light of the relationship between HIV/AIDS and poverty, and the high incidence of infection among females, measures are being taken to empower women and girls economically, to reduce their vulnerability to the disease. In addition to building the economic capacity of women, functional literacy of women and girls education are being promoted vigorously to furnish them with the necessary knowledge about their rights and roles in society with regard to HIV/AIDS, so they become full partners with their menfolk in the fight against the HIV/AIDS threat, to achieve success.

Furthermore, the prevention of mother-to-child transmission is being tackled with necessary educational campaigns and other more direct interventions at points of service.

In this regard, we take the opportunity to express our appreciation and gratitude to the United Nations system in Ghana, World Bank, DFID, USAID and other bilateral donors for their generous financial support to our national efforts. However, additional financial assistance is essential if we are to attain the goals outlined in the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS adopted at the 26th Special Session of the General Assembly.

Mr. Chairman, It is worth mentioning that, under the Global Access Fund, Ghana will be receiving some anti-retroviral drugs for HIV/AIDS patients, for the next two years. This will strengthen our crusading efforts. We are also

engaged in the provision of drugs for the prevention and management of opportunistic infections, like tuberculosis. Meanwhile, voluntary counselling and testing kits are being made available at identified hospitals and clinics in the country. Vigorous campaigns are afoot to enhance awareness about the availability of these facilities and also, educate people on the advantages of voluntary testing.

Plans are under-way for Government to produce off-patent anti-retroviral drugs for the management of HIV/AIDS. Unfortunately, our first attempt to do this in March 2003, could not take off. We faced stiff rules regarding Patent Rights and World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules and regulations. We are pleased to note, that WTO has recently relaxed these rules and regulations.

Mr. Chairman, In view of the limited resources available to developing countries in the fight against HIV/AIDS, we welcome the establishment of the Global Fund a multilateral initiative to fight AIDS. We urge increased level of contribution for sustainability of the fund

Mr. Chairman, Ghana endorses the view that the United Nations should use its unique position to ensure that programmes' resources are managed efficiently, effectively and transparently. Also, there should be objective monitoring and evaluation of such programmes and data collected must be used for policy debate and future programme design.

While we welcome recent pledges by the United States of America, the European Union and others to contribute substantially to the fight against this global pandemic, it is our hope that the existing multilateral structures would be more intensively used in ways that reduce costs and ensure that resources are more easily accessible to the poor communities of the world.

Thank You.