



SPEECH BY

**THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

H.E. MR. JAN ELIASSON

AT

THE WORLD AIDS DAY 2005 COMMEMORATION

**CATHEDRAL OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE
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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, friends

It is a great honour for me to be here with you tonight on behalf of all 191 Member States of the United Nations General Assembly. But it is also humbling, because I know I am in the presence of so many people who have done, and are doing, so much to respond to the challenges of HIV and AIDS.

I want to begin by acknowledging the work that so many communities are doing. I am pleased to announce the launch today of the Red Ribbon Award for Outstanding Community Leadership on HIV and AIDS, supported by the UNAIDS co-sponsors and by the Leadership and Community Programmes of the International AIDS Conference. This award will give greatly deserved recognition to those groups and organizations who have dedicated themselves to the fight against AIDS – through campaigning, community education and providing care.

But despite the efforts of so many, there is so much still to do. Despite twenty five years' experience of tackling this pandemic, over seven hundred people will die as a result of AIDS during the course of this evening's event. And, just as tragically, over one thousand men, women and children will be newly infected before we leave this building tonight. Over half of them will be under the age of 24. We are witnessing not just the wide scale loss of life. We're witnessing the loss of the economic lifeblood of some of the world's poorest countries.

This vast human tragedy is all the more unacceptable because it could have been avoided. The international response to HIV and AIDS was woefully

slow. This is one of the scars on the conscience of our generation. We cannot turn back the clock. But we must ensure that, when historians look at the way the world responded to HIV and AIDS, they see that 2006 was the year when the international community finally stepped up to the mark – the year when, in the words of the World AIDS campaign, the world began to ‘keep the promise’.

Just yesterday, the United Nations General Assembly made a good start when it unanimously adopted a resolution on enhancing capacity-building in global public health. The resolution urges the international community to increase investment in health services in developing countries. Such action is vital if we are to win the fight against AIDS and other diseases.

The General Assembly will also play its part next year when we convene a three-day meeting in May to recommit ourselves to the promises we made in the 2001 Declaration of Commitment. And we will be following up on the 2005 World Summit commitment to ‘developing and implementing a package for HIV prevention, treatment and care with the aim of coming as close as possible to the goal of universal access to treatment by 2010 for all those who need it’. We need to ensure that this commitment is turned into action.

Amidst the dark statistics, there is some good news. There is much more money in the system now than there was, though still not enough. And I have just come back from Geneva, where I was greatly encouraged to see for myself how the WHO, UNAIDS, the Global Fund and NGOs are working effectively together as part of a much more co-ordinated international effort

in support of countries own programmes for fighting the pandemic.

There are some good results too. In parts of the Caribbean, and a few countries in Africa, adult infection rates have begun to fall. In total, between 250,000 and 350,000 people's lives were saved last year because of expanded access to treatment. That's over one hundred Cathedrals like the one we're in tonight full of people who are living who would otherwise have been dead. That's my answer to those who say that universal access to treatment is too difficult. And it's also my answer to those who say the international system, including the UN, doesn't make a difference.

But the United Nations and its Member States need to continue hearing their citizens tell them more has to be done. 'We the peoples': those are the first three words of the UN Charter. You need to be heard. The four out of five people who are at high risk of HIV but have absolutely no access to any form of prevention need to be heard. And the thirty nine million people living with HIV but with no access to treatment must make their voices heard. You need to ask the world why it responded so well to the Indian Ocean tsunami but has yet to respond adequately to the tsunami of HIV and AIDS that is sweeping across our globe. You need to question how such selective solidarity can be justified. You need to hold the world's leaders to account. You need to ensure we 'Keep the Promise'. I look forward to hearing your strong voices as we enter the next critical year in the fight against HIV and AIDS.