



**STATEMENT BY**

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

**AT**

**THE OPENING OF THE INFORMAL  
INTERACTIVE CIVIL SOCIETY HEARING ON  
HIV/AIDS**

**UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS  
NEW YORK  
31 MAY 2006**

Secretary-General, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great privilege to open today's interactive civil society hearing. I want to thank all of you for your commitment to ending this pandemic – wherever you live and however you approach it – and for the effort you have made to be here. As I just outlined in my remarks to the opening plenary, I believe the fight against AIDS demands that all of us – all levels of government, and the broad range of civil society – work together in partnership.

The Secretary-General will say more in a moment about the vital role of civil society, and of people living with HIV in particular, in fighting the pandemic.

I will not speak at length now. I have come here to hear your voices, and to report them back to the General Assembly tomorrow afternoon.

But I do want to say this: I am pleased that today we are having this hearing as an integral part of our three days of meetings. This has not been the norm. Too often in the past, civil society hearings have taken place long before the events they relate to, and their conclusions have had less impact with the passing of time. Today, you have the opportunity to speak to the world's governments at the very moment that decisions are to be taken that could and should shape the next stage of the global response to AIDS.

You are also here in great numbers, from all regions of the world, and from all backgrounds. I know there are some colleagues who have not been able to join you – a source of frustration for me as it is for you and for them. But

the presence of so many of you will help to ensure that the realities of AIDS are brought into these halls over these three days.

For this morning is not the beginning and end of your opportunity to make your voices heard. I am glad that we will be hearing from civil society speakers also in the panels, the roundtables and the High Level Meeting.

Before I hand over to the Secretary-General, I would also like to extend a word of thanks, to the civil society task force members who have worked closely with my Office to make this hearing possible. Thanks to their efforts, today we will hear from representatives of civil society chosen by civil society, addressing issues of most importance to civil society. Just as importantly, we will have the opportunity for a genuinely interactive exchange between civil society and Member States.

Secretary-General, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

AIDS kills people. It kills development. It kills hope, it kills dreams, it kills aspirations. It kills the future. But it need not be this way. Beating this disease is entirely within our reach. All of us in public life must ask ourselves what we are doing to fight this global emergency, and what more we can do. I look forward to a hearing which tells the story of AIDS as it is, holds us all to account, shows us the way forward, and challenges us to keep the promises we have made.