

1 December 2013

**Statement of H.E. John W. Ashe  
President of the 68<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly,  
on World Aids Day**

Each year on December 1, the international community commemorates World AIDS Day by standing in solidarity with the people affected by this terrifying disease and by renewing our resolve to fight an epidemic that has claimed millions of lives across the globe.

The theme the United Nations family has adopted this year - "Getting to Zero: Zero new HIV infections. Zero discrimination. Zero AIDS-related deaths" – reflects the tremendous progress the international community has made in combating the spread of this disease. Access to life-saving anti-retroviral treatment rapidly increased between 2002 and 2012, reaching a record 10.6 million people worldwide. Moreover, the rate of new HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths continues to decline.

The United Nations General Assembly has led many of these global efforts, starting with the MDGs and the landmark 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, as well as the 2011 Political Declaration that has set out ambitious targets to be achieved by 2015.

But much work still needs to be done. There are over 35 million people living with HIV. Of those, 2.1 million are adolescents. Many countries still have punitive laws that criminalize HIV transmission and impose restrictions against entry, stay or residence for people who are HIV positive.

As part of my efforts to promote the post 2015 sustainable development agenda, I call on Member States to increase their commitment to HIV/AIDS initiatives and to reduce the onerous health costs of medication, while boosting financial flows to HIV/AIDS programmes.

Our approach must be simple – yet ambitious – to ensure that everyone who needs HIV treatment has access to it; that everyone is educated and empowered to protect themselves from HIV infection; and that the dignity and human rights of all are respected, without stigma or discrimination. These steps are critical not only to get to Zero, but also to achieve sustainable, human-centered development that addresses the needs of the most vulnerable and promotes social equity and inclusion.

We must all accelerate efforts to meet the 2015 targets, and secure and sustain the fragile gains beyond 2015, if we are to achieve a future free of AIDS.