

**ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review
Regional Ministerial Meeting for Latin America and the Caribbean on
“HIV and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean”**

**Statement by
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Montego Bay, Jamaica
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Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would first like to join the President of the Council in thanking our host, the Government of Jamaica, for their warm hospitality. I also wish to thank the Government of Luxembourg and the several partners in the UN system whose generous contribution has made this meeting possible. I welcome the opportunity to discuss the issue of HIV and development in Latin America and the Caribbean at this crucial time for global public health.

We meet at a time where we have the means to prevent, diagnose, and treat HIV. However, the lack of awareness and funding and the stigma associated with this disease make the task of achieving the Millennium Development Goals complex. We have bolstered our approach and made many improvements. Yet, much remains to be done.

We must ensure that the advancements we are making are not jeopardized by the economic and financial crisis. Health is at the core of all the MDGs. The health-related MDGs will not be achieved without addressing people's income levels, nutrition intake, living conditions and environment. At the same time, achieving all other MDGs will not be possible without a healthy population. Promoting and securing health is imperative for laying a strong foundation for prosperity, stability, and poverty reduction. For this reason, the Secretary-General has made global health one of the top priorities of the United Nations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There has been significant progress in controlling the HIV epidemic globally. As a result of improvements in prevention programs, the number of people newly infected with HIV globally declined from 3 million in 2001 to 2.7 million in 2007. Additionally, with the expansion of antiretroviral treatment services, the number of people who die from HIV has started to decline since 2005. Following almost two decades of rapid epidemic expansion, these reversals constitute

significant progress. HIV prevention has been successful in reducing high-risk sexual behaviours in the general population of many countries. Furthermore, programmes to prevent mother-to-child transmission of the disease have also been strengthened.

Yet other indicators are less encouraging. Much more needs to be done to reach the full potential of prevention programmes. Coverage of interventions to prevent HIV among injecting drug users has remained low. By the end of 2007, only one third of the 9.7 million people infected with HIV in developing countries received antiretroviral treatment. In almost every region, women represent a growing proportion of people living with the disease. The burden of children orphaned by HIV is increasing. The overall prevalence has remained the same since the year 2000. This reinforces the need for improved monitoring and evaluation strategies throughout the world.

Today's discussion on "HIV and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean" is very timely, as countries in this region face HIV epidemics, threatening the achievement of MDG 6 which is to halt and reverse the spread of HIV by 2015. While significant strides have been made in stabilizing the incidence rate in many parts of the region, further efforts are needed to curb the spread of the epidemic in the long run.

We also know that stigma, discrimination, homophobia and violence against certain groups remain very high in the Latin American and Caribbean Region, augmenting the impact of those already at high risk for HIV infection. Prevention programmes will not be effective unless they are supported by initiatives to address the social factors that increase vulnerability and risk-taking behaviour.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The economic consequences of the global financial crisis will change the context in which we will be working in the near future. The progress in achieving the MDGs must be sustained, but this will require increased effort, drive, and a renewed commitment. It is more important than ever that there is an unwavering dedication to sustaining and increasing development aid for the health sector.

In the Ministerial Declaration adopted during the 17th International AIDS Conference that took place in Mexico last year, Member States of this region committed to a set of actions to stop HIV and sexually transmissible diseases in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Our meeting today provides an opportunity to make concrete progress on these pledges. We should face these challenges head on.

I look forward to the stimulating discussions of the next two days, which are sure to make 2009 a year of renewal as much as a year of concrete success towards

the achievement of the health goals which countries have set for themselves. These discussions will also lay a solid foundation for 2009 AMR to be held in Geneva in July.

Thank you.