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STATEMENT

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PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC
OF BULGARIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

High-Level Meeting of the UN General Assembly on HIV/AIDS

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Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me on behalf of the Bulgarian Government to thank the President of the General Assembly, the Secretary General, and the Executive Director of UNAIDS for their leadership and tireless efforts in promoting and strengthening the global AIDS response.

Mr. President,

I feel honoured to have the opportunity to share with you today the successes and challenges in implementing the AIDS response in Bulgaria. In this regard, I am pleased to report that my country has maintained a low HIV prevalence rate among the general population. At the same time we have every reason to stay vigilant given our common borders with the regions of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, which are known of having the fastest growing number of new infections.

Aware of the demographic, economic, social and ethical dimensions of the AIDS epidemic, the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria remains strongly committed to implementing an effective national AIDS response and to contribute to the achievement of global goals.

As early as in 1996 the National Committee for AIDS Prevention was established to coordinate activities in this area. Since 2001 significant financial resources have been ensured annually by the Bulgarian governments for the implementation of the National Programme for Prevention and Control of HIV and Sexually Transmitted Infections. For more than 14 years now, the country has been providing up-to-date and free-of-charge antiretroviral treatment to all who need it and antiretroviral prophylaxis to prevent mother-to-child transmission.

Since the beginning of 2004, with the support of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, Bulgaria has been successful in significantly scaling-up access to and coverage of services for HIV prevention among most-at-risk and vulnerable populations, as well as care and support for people living with HIV.

Mr. President,

Presently, Bulgaria implements an integrated and balanced approach which incorporates (1) prevention; (2) treatment; and (3) care and support for people affected by the disease. The joint achievements of the government and other partners in the country include:

- Strengthened human and institutional capacity for HIV prevention, treatment and care;
- Established national standards and best practices for provision of specific services to most-at-risk and vulnerable populations. These services are primarily provided by civil society partners.
- Mobile medical units, low-threshold centers for people who inject drugs and community-based health and social centres facilitate the access.
- People living with HIV also receive quality medical care, treatment of opportunistic infections, psycho-social support and actively participate in the planning and provision of these service.

Bulgaria recognizes progress made towards national and international commitments to address the epidemic and welcomes the draft political declaration renewing these commitments to 2015. In doing so, we wish to highlight several areas of particular importance:

- reaffirming commitments for the implementation of effective national programmes for HIV prevention among most-at-risk and vulnerable populations;
- the use of human-rights based public health approaches and the initiation in legal frameworks to eliminate criminalization of HIV and discrimination of people living with the disease;
- integration of specific services for HIV, sexually transmitted infection and tuberculosis prevention and control;
- reaffirming strong financial commitments of national governments and international organizations to ensure universal access;
- strategic planning and implementation of effective programmes for universal access to diagnosis, treatment, care and support for women and children living with or affected by HIV.

In conclusion, Mr. President, let me assure you once again of the continued readiness of the Bulgarian Government to achieve its national goals and commitments in the context of the Millennium Development Goals, the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment and Universal Access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support to 2015.

Thank you.