



Permanent Mission of Eritrea
to the United Nations

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Statement

By

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At the

**High-Level Meeting on the Comprehensive Review
of the Progress Achieved in Realizing the Declaration of
Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS**

**10 June 2011
New York**

Mr. President,

It is a great honour for me to address this High Level meeting on the comprehensive review of the progress achieved in realizing the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS of 2001 and the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS of 2006. My delegation wishes also to extend its appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report and for his valuable recommendations in combating the HIV/AIDS crisis.

Mr. President,

Ten years after the adoption of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, we are gathered here on a more hopeful note, knowing fully that the strategies and programmes put in place at the national, regional and international levels are bearing fruit. It is good to recall that by 2001, there were only a handful of countries that could confidently claim that they were in the right direction in combating the pandemic disease. Today, a growing number of countries have joined in adopting appropriate policies, strategies and programmes that have been essential in the reduction of HIV incidence, in expanding access to treatment, and in the respect for the dignity and human rights of those affected by the killer disease. Yet, we cannot be complacent nor remain unaffected by the suffering it has inflicted and continues to infect and affect millions of people around the globe, in particular in the Sub-Sahara Africa where people living with HIV and AIDS is over 22 million and where in 2009 alone about 2 million people were reported as newly infected with another 1.3 million AID related deaths occurring.

Mr. President,

Whatever efforts are employed, the key word is "scaling-up". Given the epidemiological nature of the virus, and if success is to deepen and widen, my delegation believes the review process should give serious consideration to scaling up of our collective efforts towards universal access to comprehensive HIV prevention, treatment, care and support programmes. Time is of the essence. Let's not forget that the infectious disease was first reported in the eighties, yet it took us over a decade to get together and acknowledge of its occurrence and of the danger it posed to humanity, including in my country where in the early days of independence there existed few number of health professionals along with poor health infrastructure facilitates to deal with the scourge of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases.

When the political declaration was adopted in 2001 by the United Nations General Assembly Special Session, the overall infection rate in Eritrea was estimated to be around 2.8%. Eritrea needed to make substantial investment to modernize health infrastructure and expand better medical service across the nation, including in remote areas not only to combat HIV/AIDS and other deadly diseases, such as malaria and tuberculosis, which used to claim many lives in the country, but also to provide basic health services. Now the spread of the disease has dropped to less than 1%. This has been possible to the country's determination and leadership and involvement of partners in improving access to treatment and care services and in instituting effective public awareness campaign, even if it meant sometimes against existing cultural taboos. The awareness campaign waged by the youth was in particular commendable as noted in the report of the UN Secretary-General. Eritrea from the outset sought for strategic partnership to

support a multi-sectoral approach for a cross-cutting problem that affects all sectors of social and economic life of the country.

While Eritrea recognized the value of making the whole populace aware of the disease, it was able to target in its intervention the most vulnerable groups of the society, such as sex workers, truck drivers, the military, TB patients, women and children and the youth, in order to effectively prevent, control and reduce the spread of the disease.

The Government has been disbursing over 1 million USD annually to provide medical care to nationals living with HIV/AIDS so as to enable them to lead as normal life as possible. About 6,680 are taking the antiretroviral drugs. Rehabilitation programs and anti-discrimination campaigns are also part of the strategy that involves people living with HIV/AIDS organized to cope with the impact of the disease. Moreover, further assistance is provided by the government to orphans and patients in order to become self-supporting.

Mr. President,

Although the spread of HIV/AIDS is at its lowest level in Eritrea relative to the other countries in the region, my delegation is nonetheless convinced that concerted actions is needed to vigorously combat the epidemic as the country is located in high-risk region. Eritrea has drawn a 5-year strategic plan for 2008-2012, with a strong voluntary counselling and testing component to ensure evidence based approach to the disease throughout the country. The plan is implemented in collaboration with all partners. Expansion and improvement of quality of services with the view of achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support remain part of the key strategy against HIV/AIDS adopted by the Government of Eritrea.

Mr. President,

We have and will benefit from our collective wisdom at this high level session in mapping out most effective way to control the killer HIV/AIDS. The global HIV situation demands of us all in putting every effort at our disposal in building on our successes by combating and controlling the most pressing health issue ever encountered by humanity worldwide.

Let me conclude by taking this occasion to stress Eritrea's pledge to the full implementation and realization of the time-bound and measurable goals and targets of the UN Commitment on HIV/AIDS under consideration before us. There are resources and the know how to deal with HIV/AIDS. It must be the goal of the international community that the implementation of our expressed declaration at this august body should be followed by unified action.

Thank you.