



The Permanent Mission of Iceland to the United Nations

**Statement by
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Permanent Representative**

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Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to welcome the report of the Secretary-General on the progress made towards realizing the targets set out in the Declaration of Commitment on HIV and AIDS and what still remains to be done. Iceland fully supports the recommendations in the report as well as the Declaration that will be adopted at the end of this meeting.

In combating AIDS much has been achieved; many HIV programmes have led to a decline in global HIV incidence, access to treatment has greatly improved and an unparalleled global movement has been mobilized to demand respect for the dignity and human rights of everyone vulnerable to, and affected by HIV and AIDS.

However, as pointed out in the Secretary-General's report, these accomplishments, while promising, are insufficient and in jeopardy. Gender inequality, stigma and discrimination, including on the basis of sexual orientation, continue to undermine our efforts. Vulnerable groups, such as men who have sex with men, sex workers and drug addicts are often denied treatment. An unsustainable trajectory of costs and the effects of a global economic downturn also threaten progress.

Mr. President,

Currently, Iceland is witnessing a steady increase in HIV infections. This unfortunate development is mainly linked to intravenous drug abuse. Different approaches have been used to fight this trend in Iceland, both by the Government and NGOs as well as the private sector.

Drug addicts are a vulnerable group, hard to reach for preventive measures, care and treatment. The Icelandic Red Cross has recently established a "mobile" clinic, offering service directly to the most vulnerable drug addicts. The aim is to minimize the harmfulness of their lifestyle by providing them with clean equipment to prevent further HIV and hepatitis C infections among them.

Also, firmly believing that education at all levels and raising awareness is crucial to HIV prevention, students at the primary school level receive education on reproductive health and rights, the use of condoms and protection. On the basis of "youth educating youth", medical

students have been reaching out to college students on these same issues. Recently, the public and private sector launched a joint campaign nationwide, promoting the use of condoms to prevent STDs and HIV infections.

Furthermore, youngsters have access to confidential medical testing and counselling at public health clinics, and social media, such as facebook, is being used as a platform for guidance and counselling and providing an opportunity for questions to be asked anonymously.

The health of women and girls is vital to the process of strengthening life-saving responses to HIV and AIDS. We therefore need to focus our attention on achieving gender equality and empowering women to ensure that women and girls don't bear the disproportionate burden of this epidemic, be it infections, care giving, or as victims of discrimination.

Mr. President,

The promotion of human rights is key to our approach. This includes empowering women which will also benefit their children. It also means respecting the rights and dignity of vulnerable groups such as men who have sex with men, sex workers and drug addicts.

Iceland remains committed to continue the battle against the HIV epidemic both nationally and through our international cooperation. No country can afford to look away. Only with concerted efforts can we remove the obstacles and eliminate this epidemic.

Thank you, Mr. President