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Statement by Honorable Dharma Shila Chapagai, Minister of State for Health and Population
Government of Nepal at the High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS
New York, 10 June 2011

(Check against delivery)

Mr. President,

I feel honored to bring the best wishes from the people and Government of Nepal for the success of the conference. It is a privilege for me to address this High Level Meeting on the comprehensive review of the progress achieved in realizing two milestone declarations namely the "Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS" and the "Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS" adopted by the General Assembly in 2001 and 2006 respectively to unite the world in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Mr. President,

Even today after three decades, it is a matter of serious concern that over 7000 new HIV/AIDS infections occur every day. HIV AIDS pandemic is a major global health problem affecting many countries around the world, in particular the low and middle income countries. It severely undermines people's health and wellbeing as well as our development efforts.

We have made some progress in reducing the rate of new HIV infections and mother-to-child transmission, while expanding access to HIV antiretroviral treatment. However, much remains to be done and rightly so in view of the huge number of people living with HIV/AIDS.

There is no doubt that the resource flow to fight this menace has increased over the years. Yet, millions of people are still outside the basic coverage of minimum health services in many parts of the world. A shared responsibility must be based on equity and equality. Similarly, sustainable financial resources and funding flows, consolidation of the national health system, integrated efforts of all the stakeholders with national leadership are critical for an effective and accountable response.

Needless to say, prevention is better than cure. Hence, prevention must constitute the cornerstone of the global HIV and AIDS response. It is our firm conviction that access to safe, effective, affordable, good quality medicine and commodities, including generic medicine for HIV treatment would greatly help our effort for HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. There is a need to ensure at the global level that Intellectual Property Rights provisions in trade agreements remain favorable for the easy access to affordable medicine. It is equally important that the fruits of scientific research, invention and innovation should be equitably shared at the same time for the welfare of mankind to have a maximum effect.

Women and girls are still the most affected group. In this context, there is a need to fight against gender inequalities, insufficient access to healthcare and services, and all forms of discrimination and violence, including sexual and gender based violence and exploitation. We must ensure their sexual and reproductive health.

Mr. President,

National estimates in Nepal indicate that there are 63000 HIV/AIDS cases. Since 1988, when the first case was reported, till July 2011, some 17000 HIV/AIDS cases were reported. Out of these figures, some 5500 people are getting antiretroviral treatment. This indicates that a large proportion of people are in need of treatment, care and support.

The Least Developed countries like Nepal lack adequate resources to effectively deal with the menace of HIV/AIDS. However, despite resource constraints, the Government of Nepal has accorded top priority to fight against HIV/AIDS in its national health care policy. Necessary policy measures have been adopted and we are in the process of finalizing a comprehensive HIV/AIDS bill which is now under consideration of National Legislature Parliament. National HIV/AIDS Policy 2010 has already been adopted and we are in the process of finalizing a HIV/AIDS strategy 2011-2016, which will be announced soon.

Nepal is undertaking a multistakeholder response to HIV/AIDS encompassing prevention, treatment, care and support to PLAs. Our response specially targets most vulnerable populations including intravenous drug users, man having sex with man (MSM), labour migrants, and clients of female sex workers. The Government of Nepal is committed to ensuring human rights of HIV/AIDS affected and infected population; and has taken appropriate measures to address stigma and discrimination related to HIV/AIDS.

Nepal has made necessary institutional arrangements for comprehensive response towards HIV/AIDS. We have formed a National AIDS Council headed by the Rt. Honourable Prime Minister of Nepal, which amply testify our high level national commitment. HIV/AIDS and STD Control Board is responsible for multisectoral coordination and collaboration, and policy formulation. National Centre for AIDS and STD Control has been working for treatment, care and support, and monitoring and evaluation.

While we continue to grapple with traditional development challenges, fighting against HIV/AIDS is an additional burden for us that calls for an enhanced level of flow of resources from the international community. Sharing of experiences and best practices, access to affordable medicine, access to new treatment and production technology will be the deciding factors in our seriousness of the global fight against HIV AIDS. We have the means, but we need to summon the global political will and resources to intensify our response in an effective manner, while looking towards a better future for all of us.

I thank you.