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Statement

by

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at

The High-level Meeting of the UN General Assembly

on Comprehensive Review of the Progress Achieved in realizing the Declaration of
Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS

UN Headquarters, New York

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Pakistan Statement at the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on
Comprehensive Review of the Progress Achieved in realizing the Declaration of
Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

I feel privileged to be present in this august gathering that is reviewing the progress, challenges, opportunities and lessons learnt in realizing the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the 2006 Political Declaration.

Three decades after the global recognition of this killer disease, UNAIDS data clearly shows steady progress towards totally eliminating new infections, discrimination and AIDS related deaths through universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. This is encouraging.

Unfortunately, however, such gains are still tenuous and have not reached everyone in need. More than 10 million people still await HIV treatment and for every single person starting treatment, two new people become infected. The world, therefore, continues to face the enormous and multiplying consequences of this epidemic.

Perseverance in our efforts remains the key to efficient implementation of national, regional and global plans together with allocation of sufficient resources and the involvement of all stakeholders to overcome the menace of AIDS. Pakistan is proud to be part of this high level meeting, which is a testimony to the commitment of the world leaders to the global fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Mr. President,

The Secretary General's report presents a comprehensive view of the progress achieved in realizing commitments and meeting time bound targets agreed to by Member States in the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the Political Declaration. It notes the encouraging trend of decline in the global rate of new HIV infections, expansion in access to treatment and significant strides made in reducing HIV transmissions from mother to child. At the same time, however, the report while noting the remarkable expansion of antiretroviral treatment in low and middle income countries, also highlights the continued but fragile progress in expanding access to treatment. We, therefore, echo the calls made by the Secretary General to

all stakeholders to renew and strengthen their commitment to achieve universal access, which should form part of the bridge towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

We also agree with the SG's finding that Prevention is the mainstay of the HIV response. Accordingly, we support his recommendations to ensure comprehensive access for all affectees regardless of the reasons for their illness and to include comprehensive HIV coverage in the National Health Programmes including necessary Education to all, in line with their national priorities and commitments on the subject.

Mr. President,

Until recently a 'low prevalence high risk' country, Pakistan is now, in a 'concentrated phase' of the epidemic with HIV prevalence of more than 5% among injecting drug users (IDUs). The proportion of HIV infection among other categories like sex workers, unemployed youth and urban injected drug users is still increasing. According to the latest national estimates, there are approximately 97,400 cases of HIV/AIDS in Pakistan. The geographic trend of the epidemic is expanding from major urban cities to smaller cities and towns. However, latest prevalence estimation models indicate that fortunately the HIV prevalence among general adult population is still below 0.1%. This provides a vital window of opportunity to influence the future course of the epidemic in our country.

Response to the HIV epidemic in Pakistan has been a coordinated effort of the government, alongwith bilateral and multilateral donors, the UN System and civil society. The National AIDS Control Programme (NACP) has come a long way since 1986 to develop into a comprehensive and effective response to the threat of HIV and AIDS epidemic in Pakistan. The Programme initiated an enhanced multi-sectoral response to the epidemic in 2003 with the help of the international donors and other partners. The first phase of this response concluded in December 2009. The next 5-year phase envisages consolidation of achievements made and scaling up of services to widen geographical coverage of services.

Currently, the National response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic is being dealt with under the rubric of the National HIV and AIDS Strategic Framework for 2007-12, which articulates a vision/ response in line with the national policy on HIV/AIDS and elaborates it through guiding principles, goals, strategic objectives and priority areas commensurate with the emerging HIV/AIDS epidemic. There are three major components of the enhanced programme including HIV Prevention and Treatment, Advocacy and Communication, Governance and Institutional Framework.

The National AIDS Control Program and its provincial units are currently implementing a comprehensive program throughout the country to halt the HIV epidemic. The programme provides strategic direction and its operationalization involves all HIV and AIDS stakeholders including government departments and ministries, non-governmental organizations, community based organizations, private companies, researchers, professional associations, development partners, trusts and foundations in the country. Civil society of Pakistan is actively sharing the implementation burden of the public sector and has established network structures like National and Provincial AIDS consortia that are playing a critical role in facilitating and coordinating civil society efforts.

Mr. President,

It is a fact that majority of the AIDS victims are living in developing countries. The incidence rate is aggravated by poverty, hunger, disease, lack of medical facilities, illiteracy and under-development. The problem of HIV/AIDS cannot be dealt with as a health issue alone. It, indeed, is a development issue as well since poverty is directly contributing to the spread of HIV/AIDS. The special session of the General Assembly in 2001, therefore, rightly likened the HIV/AIDS situation to a global emergency and dubbed it one of the most formidable challenges to the international community and global development goals.

Combating HIV/AIDS and eradicating poverty must, therefore, go hand in hand. This cannot be achieved without active and determined cooperation on the part of the international community with special participation of the developed countries which have a moral obligation to set aside a part of their wealth to reduce the burden of poverty and alleviate human suffering. Low cost drugs, lower profits, new scientific research and sharing of knowledge and necessary facilities are needed to achieve common and sustainable solutions. There is a great urgency to respond to the needs of the developing countries by enhancing debt relief, market access and Official Development Assistance.

Given the human, social and economic costs of HIV, "business as usual" is unacceptable. We, therefore, reiterate the just call made by the Secretary General upon international donors not to reduce HIV spending as a result of the global economic downturn but, instead, to commit to further enhance funding to meet the agreed commitments to universalize access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. We also hope that the Declaration adopted by this meeting will serve to enhance the global response to this epidemic and meet the desired targets of "Zero new infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS related deaths".

I thank you Mr. President.