

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**REMARKS TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY HIGH-LEVEL MEETING ON
HIV/AIDS
New York, 8 June 2011**

General Assembly President [Joseph] Deiss,
Distinguished heads of State and government,
Honourable ministers,
Excellencies,
Eminent representatives of civil society and the private sector,

Thirty years ago, AIDS was terrifying, deadly and spreading fast.

Today, we have a chance to end this epidemic once and for all.

The story of how we got here was written by many of you. The governments, the medical community, the private sector and above all the activists who struggled against AIDS in their lives and around the world.

Many of you remember the early days in the 1980s. The terrible fear of a new plague. The isolation of those infected.

Some would not even shake hands with a person living with HIV.

Our fellow human beings suffered not only sickness but discrimination or, worse, vilification.

Looking back, there is much we could have done differently. Looking ahead, there are also proud accomplishments that this General Assembly can build on.

From its birth, the campaign against AIDS was much more than a battle against disease. It was a cry for human rights. It was a call for gender equality. It was a fight to end discrimination based on sexual orientation. And it was a demand for the equal treatment of all people.

In 2001, leaders in this room adopted an historic declaration. They took responsibility for controlling the epidemic. And they promised to be accountable for results.

Since then, new infections have declined by 20 percent.

Five years ago, here in the General Assembly, leaders set specific targets for the global AIDS response. They pledged that every individual would get services, care and support to cope with HIV and AIDS.

Since then, AIDS-related deaths fell by 20 percent.

Thirty years ago, AIDS threatened development gains in poor regions around the world.

Today, HIV is on a steep decline in some of the most affected countries. Countries like Ethiopia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. They had the largest epidemics in the world, and they have cut infection rates by one quarter.

Globally, more than six million people now get treatment.

All of these advances come thanks to you and the commitments you made, first ten years ago and then again in 2006.

Today, the challenge has changed.

Today, we gather to end AIDS.

That is our goal: an end to AIDS within the decade – zero new infections, zero stigma and zero AIDS-related deaths.

But ... if we are to relegate AIDS to the history books, we must be bold.

That means facing sensitive issues, including men who have sex with men, drug users and the sex trade.

I admit those were not subjects I was used to dealing with when I came to this job. But I have learned to say what needs to be said because millions of lives are at stake.

I was inspired by young people ... by people living with HIV ... and by my predecessor, Kofi Annan.

He made the campaign against AIDS a top personal priority.

Ten years ago last month, Secretary-General Annan met in a small conference room in Amsterdam with six leading pharmaceutical companies.

At the time, the first AIDS drugs offered hope – hope for people who could afford them. The pharmaceutical companies were coming under great pressure. Non-governmental organizations were mobilizing against them, demanding universal access.

Secretary-General Annan extended a hand. He asked the pharmaceutical conglomerates for help in getting AIDS medicines to all who need them. And the companies agreed.

This led to the establishment of the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria – a revolution that has been saving lives around the world.

I applied this model to our campaign to reduce child and maternal mortality. The Global Strategy on Women's and Children's Health is built on the same principle of partnership. And it also addresses AIDS.

We also have a new Global Plan to eliminate HIV infections in children by 2015 and keep their mothers alive. That will bring our Global Strategy to life with clear, time-bound commitments, shared responsibility and leadership.

Excellencies,

Today's historic meeting is a call to action.

First, we need all partners to come together in global solidarity as never before. That is the only way to truly provide universal access to HIV prevention, treatment and care by 2015.

Second, we have to lower costs and deliver better programmes.

Third, we must commit to accountability.

Fourth, we must ensure that our HIV responses promote the health, human rights, security and dignity of women and girls.

Fifth, we must trigger a prevention revolution, harnessing the power of youth and new communications technology to reach the entire world.

If we take these five steps, we can stop AIDS. We can end the fear. We can stop the suffering and death it brings.

We can get to an AIDS-free world.

Thank you.