



ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Commerce and Trade of St. Vincent and the Grenadines

Administrative Bldg., 3rd Flr., Kingstown, St. Vincent • Tel: (784) 456-2060 • Fax: (784) 456-2610

Statement

By

H.E. The Honourable Dr. Douglas Slater

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Commerce and Trade of St. Vincent and the Grenadines

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

9 June, 2011
United Nations Headquarters
New York, USA

Please check against delivery

Mr. President, Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines joins the international community in making a sober reflection of the achievements and challenges of the HIV/AIDS response over the past three decades. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and the CARICOM region in general, have experienced notable progress – such as a more than 25% decrease in the incidence of HIV infections – while providing treatment and care for a significant percentage of persons infected and or affected by HIV; thus resulting in notable improvement of quality of their lives. It is important to note that all of this progress and positive achievements are occurring in the context of a hostile global economic and financial environment, which places severe stress on our already scarce resources.

Among the major challenges in the HIV/AIDS response is achieving an appropriate behavioral change necessary to ensure or improve our efforts to reduce the transmission of HIV. Also, despite some progress, the issue of stigma and discrimination of people living with AIDS (PLWA) and other vulnerable groups remain an important task/challenge. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and indeed the region must commit ourselves to continue to address these issues taking into consideration the many varied stakeholders in our societies. Multifaceted education initiatives and shared responsibility are key in sparking positive behavioural changes – both among the wider society, which must squarely confront lingering issues of stigmatization, as well as within vulnerable groups, where individuals must continue to take even greater responsibility for actions that minimize the risk of exposure and transmission.

The response of our care-givers, together with our very strong political commitment, have placed us well on the way to an HIV-free generation, and we are making progress towards achieving zero mother to child transmission (MTCT) by 2015. However, this element of the response must be re-enforced by stronger emphasis on general prevention of HIV transmission. As such, the international community must pursue and collectively champion a veritable “PREVENTION REVOLUTION” involving especially the energy of our youth.

Mr. President,

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is committed to a continued investment of its limited resources towards achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. In consideration of the ongoing unfavorable conditions in the global economic environment, we must continue to find more efficient and sustainable ways of achieving these goals. This will require also the commitment and increased support of various international partners/donors. In this regard, we remind and encourage our partners to provide additional resources to the various funding agencies, especially the UN Global Fund. We also call for exploration of innovative means to generate the necessary financing to step up our war against this scourge.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is heavily reliant on generic medications in leading our national assault against HIV/AIDS. The willingness of States to not only allow, but to champion the widest and most flexible distribution of all generic medications remains the standard by which the developing world will continue to judge their commitment to global eradication of HIV/AIDS. Legal and political straw men are of little comfort to the millions of people who still cannot access medication that remains too expensive, despite the progress we have made on pricing. Three decades into this struggle, no human being should be suffering and dying simply because the necessary medication was priced out of their government’s reach.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines believes that the response must at all times take a holistic approach to the many health challenges that confront us. We must at all times strive to promote sociological concepts such as Human Rights of citizens and also the dignity of our women and girls.

We believe that PLWA have a right and certainly the responsibility to be included and firmly involved in the AIDS response process. Reliable research data should be utilized to guide targeted interventions in populations that are the main drivers of the transmission. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines reiterates its commitment to pursue efforts to minimize HIV related stigma and discrimination.

Mr. President,

Like everyone in this room, I continue to hope for a cure for those living with HIV and AIDS and a vaccine to prevent new infections. While we encourage the scientists to continue their critical work for a cure, we, the representatives of the worlds' governments, must acknowledge that even today we already possess the knowledge and the tools to arrest, reduce and ultimately eliminate the spread of HIV and AIDS. With continued education, shared responsibility, access to medication and the necessary political will on all levels, we can collectively end the days where the illness was considered a death sentence, while looking forward to a world without AIDS.

I thank you.