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STATEMENT

BY

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COMMISSION AND HEAD OF UGANDA'S DELEGATION**

AT

UNITED NATIONS HIGH-LEVEL MEETING ON HIV/AIDS

New York,

June 8-10, 2011

please check against delivery

Mr. President,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am speaking on behalf of His Excellency Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, the President of the Republic of Uganda who, due to prior commitments, is unable to attend this important High-Level meeting.

My delegation welcomes the convening of this meeting to review the global HIV/AIDS response including our commitment to Universal Access to HIV prevention, care and treatment in the quest to transform our societies. While we recognise the significant progress that has been made in terms of mobilizing extraordinary levels of financial resources, as well as the efforts by our scientists to find effective vaccines and drugs that can cure HIV/AIDS, this disease remains one of the greatest challenges of our time.

Recent global figures show that our combined efforts are bearing fruits in reducing the number of new infections and providing life saving drugs to most of the persons who need them. However, HIV/AIDS response demands a higher level of solidarity and shared responsibility in order to achieve universal access to HIV prevention, care and treatment and support by 2015 in line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

Like many developing countries, Uganda still faces some challenges in meeting a number of targets of the MDGs including with respect to HIV/AIDS. With a generalized epidemic where 6.4% of adults older than 15 years are HIV positive and approximately 1.2 million people out of a population of 32 million today carry the virus that causes AIDS, the task before us is enormous. It is becoming evident that we must shift and focus resources on selected evidence-informed measures that will enhance efficiency and generate results, while promoting country and people-owned responses.

Mr. President,

From our experience in the fight against HIV/AIDS over the last two decades, political commitment at the highest level is invaluable in mobilizing multi-sectoral responses that involve government, civil society, the private sector, and other partners.

Recent surveys in Uganda have pointed to emerging pockets of new infections of HIV in our society. However, with support from UNAIDS and development partners, detailed studies have also revealed the changing face of the epidemic. As a matter of urgency, the Government is developing strategies with appropriate actions to address the emerging phenomenon.

We pay tribute to our partners for their support that has assisted many of our people, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa who would have died in the absence of life saving interventions such as antiretroviral therapy (ART). But in the face of rising new infections, it is going to be very difficult to put all those illegible on treatment. In Uganda, currently about 550,000 people need ART, but by December 2010 only 270,000 were accessing it.

Mr. President,

We note with optimism recent breakthroughs in research where initiation of ART when the CD4 count is still high provides people living with HIV/AIDS a better quality of life, longevity, and also acts as a preventive measure to break transmission of the virus from the infected to uninfected. People living with HIV/AIDS should be supported and given hope of living a normal positive life. However, the biggest challenge that we continue to face is to mobilize sufficient resources to buy these drugs.

There have also been other commendable biomedical research efforts to find new drugs, microbicides, vaccine candidates and implementation of other strategies such as pre-exposure prophylaxis. We call upon our partners to sustain and if possible increase funding for research in pursuit of an effective vaccine and cure for HIV/AIDS.

Uganda strongly supports the African Union position on the right of each country to implement HIV/AIDS programmes consistent with national laws and development priorities. It is essential to respect the religious, ethical values as well as cultural backgrounds of the various people in conformity with universally recognized international human rights.

In Uganda, like many African countries, women and young girls still bear the brunt of the HIV epidemic. Women constitute 57% of the infected people, they are more involved in care giving, but they are not sufficiently empowered to make independent decisions concerning their lives. African countries should be supported to develop and implement targeted interventions for women and girls in order to overcome the inhibitions of gender disparities.

Mr. President,

While our major focus is HIV prevention, a more comprehensive approach will be more effective. In this regard, many African countries are strengthening their health systems to ensure quality and timely service delivery in order to achieve universal access to HIV/AIDS services. These efforts need to be supported by development partners.

In conclusion, as the HIV epidemic continues to spread and ravage many of our communities especially in sub-Saharan African, prevention remains the mainstay in the control of HIV/AIDS. It is therefore essential to ensure that we mobilize substantial resources for universal coverage of HIV interventions.

I thank you for your attention.

