

22 September 2003

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Julian Robert Hunte,  
President of the 58th Session of the General Assembly,  
at the High-level Plenary Meeting on HIV/AIDS**

Distinguished Heads of State and Heads of Government, Excellencies, Mr. Secretary General, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The participation of so many distinguished Heads of State and Government in this High-level Plenary on HIV/AIDS is of immense satisfaction. I thank you and other Ministerial representatives for the leadership you are providing by your attendance today, and express my appreciation to you all for your participation.

We last gathered at the Twenty-sixth Special Session of the General Assembly in 2001 to assess the unfolding tragedy of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. We pledged to take comprehensive and systematic action in the Declaration of Commitments on HIV/AIDS.

This High-level Plenary, therefore, is primarily about how well we have kept the commitments made up to 2003, and whether we are on target to keep those commitments for 2005. It is also about keeping commitments made in the Millennium Declaration to halt the spread of the disease and begin the process of reversal by 2015.

Only if we keep our commitments, will we reduce numbers such as the 42 million people estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS worldwide, half of whom are adult women, and 95% of whom live in the developing world. We need to keep our commitments to decrease the number of deaths due to AIDS, 80% of which occur in Sub-Saharan Africa, and to tackle the devastating impact of the disease on the vulnerable small developing states of the Caribbean.

We must take steps to reduce the number of children born with HIV, the growing number of AIDS orphans, and the estimated 5 million who acquired HIV in just one year - 2002. We must confront stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS and ensure that prevention and awareness programmes reach people at risk and improve access to affordable medicines. UNAIDS estimates that we are falling far short of the US\$10.5 billion needed annually by 2005 to effectively fight the epidemic in low and middle-income countries. If we are to achieve all this, we must be committed.

We know that HIV/AIDS is much more than a public health problem, but impacts virtually every aspects of human endeavour. HIV/AIDS interventions must go hand in hand with policies that address poverty, socio-economic development, human welfare and social cohesion. This is a direction in which we must continue.

There are signs that we are making progress in implementing our undertakings in the Declaration on HIV/AIDS, as well as the Millennium Declaration. In his Report, "Progress towards implementation of the Declaration of Commitments on HIV/AIDS, the Secretary General also confirms that progress has been made, both in respect of action underway and the allocation of resources. This is good news. Regrettably, it must be juxtaposed against a shortfall in the resources of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Further progress will be made if we heed the Secretary-General's warning that the continuing HIV/AIDS crisis requires "an unprecedented mobilisation of resources".

Many of the important strides we are making are underpinned by the work of UNAIDS. As the leading advocate for global action against the HIV/AIDS pandemic UNAIDS and its co-sponsoring agencies have proven to be important partners, including with governments, non-governmental organisation, civil society and the private sector. We commend them for their work, and urge them to continue to make their critical contribution.

Ultimately, however, it falls to Governments to provide the leadership and vision to confront the crisis in their own countries and to cooperate in the global fight against HIV/AIDS. At this High-Level Plenary, we must reaffirm our pledge to halt and reverse the HIV/AIDS pandemic and build on the foundation we set in 2002. For it is only in this way that we will meet the formidable challenges ahead.

A full range of activities will take place today, including an interactive panel at the level of Heads of State and Government, other panel discussions, briefings and exhibitions. I would encourage all to participate fully in these activities. However, what we do here today will only have an impact when we follow up with action at the national, regional and international level and effectively confront this most deadly epidemic of our time.

I look forward to a dynamic and progressive discussion.