

12 June 2008

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Srgjan Kerim,
President of the 62nd Session of the General Assembly,
at the Closing of the High-Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS**

Excellencies
Distinguished Delegates,

May I first of all thank all the delegations that have come from across the globe to attend this High-level meeting on HIV/AIDS.

We have had a rich and engaging debate over the last three days, involving active participation from Member States, representatives from civil society and UN agencies, funds and programmes.

I would like to briefly highlight some of the key themes which emerged from our discussions;

First, that the HIV/AIDS pandemic is a public health as well as a development issue. Some delegations made the point that in their respective countries, HIV/AIDS is among the biggest threats to their sustained economic development and the achievement of the MDGs. An effective response to the pandemic must therefore become a central feature of all our development efforts. This means that strengthening public health systems, including by stemming the brain drain, must go hand in hand with an effective national strategy to combat HIV/AIDS.

Second, an effective response to the pandemic must have human rights and gender equality at its core. The rights of people living with AIDS, and other vulnerable groups must be protected, including women's rights to make informed decisions about their sexual health. In this regard, civic education and courageous leadership are critical. Stigmatisation and discrimination, including travel restrictions, drive the pandemic under-ground, from where an effective response becomes impossible.

Third, there must be better access to prevention, treatment, and support services, especially for those populations at most risk. As several speakers correctly pointed out, there is no single approach or "one size fits all" solution. We must therefore have a more comprehensive approach that includes better public education programmes, particularly for young adults. Prevention and treatment must be more accessible to everyone, including for drug users, sex workers, and sexual minorities. And, preventing HIV transmission from mother-to-child must be eliminated in developing countries, as it has almost been in developed countries.

Fourth, our response to the pandemic must be inclusive. Governments, community leaders, civil society and other international actors are all part of the same team. Our collective efforts must be

joined-up, complementary and coherent. We must better integrate policies and approaches that address HIV/AIDS, TB and drug-use to reflect the multifaceted nature of the pandemic.

The role of the UN system, and UNAIDS in particular, is critical to this partnership. Several Member States have made the point that the UN system must have the capacity to ensure that national efforts are coordinated and complementary so that we can progress steadily to our 2010 universal access target.

And fifth, leadership and political accountability are the most important part of the solution. At the highest levels, this is necessary so that enough human and financial resources are allocated for an effective and sustained response. At the community level effective leadership means “knowing your epidemic”, to ensure that local populations understand the realities and consequences of the epidemic. It’s therefore of particular importance to involve youth as an integral part of the solution as they have the most to lose.

Excellencies,

Before closing the meeting, I would like to convey a special vote of thanks to my two facilitators, Ambassador Tiina Intelmann, the Permanent Representative of Estonia, and Ambassador Samuel Outlule, the former Permanent Representative of Botswana. They have both worked tirelessly over the last seven months to ensure that we were all well prepared for this important meeting.

I would also like to recognise the important contributions of the Civil Society Task Force, especially for facilitating the participation of representatives of civil society who gave voice to the people and communities around the world that experience the everyday reality and impact of HIV/AIDS.

May I also thank Dr. Peter Piot and the entire UNAIDS team for their efforts. Since this is the last time that Dr. Piot will participate as UNAIDS Executive Director, I would like to use this opportunity to commend him for his years of service to global public health. He has been a committed leader and has helped shape UNAIDS into an organisation that is equal to the challenge of fighting the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Excellencies,

In the coming weeks, I shall issue a comprehensive summary of this high-level meeting. The summary will reflect the views expressed during all of our discussions.

History will judge how effectively we rose to the challenge of HIV/AIDS. Our global response must continue to be a collective effort. No State or individual organisation can succeed alone.

And, our renewed determination must be matched with accelerated implementation of our commitments to achieve universal access to HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, and support by 2010.

We must not lose the momentum of our global response. For every two people that begin HIV treatment there are five new HIV/AIDS infections.

I thank you.