

16 June 2009

**Statement of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann,
President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly,
on the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the Political
Declaration on HIV/AIDS**

Excellencies,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Dear Friends,

On behalf of the General Assembly, I thank the Secretary-General for his report on progress made and challenges remaining in our global response to AIDS. We are encouraged by the good news. Financial resources for HIV increased in 2008, and we continue to make progress in bringing HIV treatments to people who only recently lacked access. More pregnant women living with HIV use services to prevent HIV transmission to their babies. More children than ever are receiving treatment.

Still, we are reminded that in 2006 the General Assembly pledged to achieve universal access to comprehensive HIV prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010.

The deadline that we have set for ourselves is now only 18 months away. Are we on track?

The latest information and analysis tell a story of our shortcomings as a global community. There are 29 million people who need care, support, prevention measures and HIV treatment worldwide that still lack these medications. Roughly two out of three HIV-positive pregnant women do not receive services to prevent mother-to-child transmission. And the pace of the new HIV infections is occurring faster than the rate at which we are expanding treatment access.

Particular aspects of the global AIDS response are cause for special concern.

We think of our afflicted Brothers and Sisters in Africa. That continent alone is home to 22 million people living with HIV. In 2007, three out of four AIDS deaths world-wide occurred in this region.

We have begun to build the systems that are needed to sustain HIV treatment and prevention over the next generation. But I must emphasize that we have only just begun. In the absence of a cure, we must enhance treatment and, the hardest part, the prevention campaigns. Ultimately, however, our task is to promote just and caring societies with policies and programmes that empower the most vulnerable if we are to be effective. The task ahead of us is enormous, but with commitment and determination it is achievable. We know that it is a moral and ethical imperative as well.

Sadly, the history of AIDS illustrates our failure to serve and protect the most vulnerable.

Women now represent 60 percent of all people living with HIV in Africa. Women's right to own or inherit property is still unrecognized in many parts of the world, condemning many women affected by AIDS to destitution and worse. And many women and girls continue to be subjected to gender-based violence, increasing their risk and vulnerability for HIV. We cannot fail women in our response to AIDS.

We must also do more for our children. An estimated 370,000 children under 15 became infected with HIV in 2007. HIV-infected children are also less likely than HIV-positive adults to receive life-preserving HIV therapies. Approximately 15 million children have lost one or both parents to AIDS, but fewer than one in six households in which these orphans live received any form of assistance in 2007.

Unfortunately, in many countries there are still laws that hinder access to critical life-saving services for the groups most at risk of HIV, such as men who have sex with men, drug users and sex workers. Such laws contribute to the stigma and discrimination that violate the dignity and human rights of those most in need of our understanding and solidarity.

The global community's pledge to move towards universal access by the end of next year is an encouraging expression of global solidarity with the individuals, households and communities that are suffering most from this disease.

The question today is whether we will keep the promises we have made.

People living with HIV/AIDS have been placed at greater risk as a result of the global financial and economic crisis that is crippling economies around the world. As a result of this ongoing crisis, I fear that many governments are resigned to reducing programmes and diminished expectations. Inevitably, people are questioning the feasibility of visionary global aims during a time of economic crisis. The recently declared H1N1 pandemic adds a new level of complexity and further tests our collective will.

But it is precisely when times are difficult that our true values and the sincerity of our commitment are most clearly evident.

Even as we see signs of cutbacks in AIDS funding in many countries, we must remind governments and the international community that the world has the resources to mount the kind of AIDS response to which we have committed. If we allow cuts now, we will face increased costs and great human suffering in the future.

As UNAIDS recently reminded us, the amounts needed to achieve universal access represent a miniscule fraction of the sums that have been spent this year on economic stimulus measures. We continue to tolerate the obscenity of growing arms expenditures, which last year totaled almost one and a half trillion dollars globally, an increase of 45 per cent since 1999. By contrast, for countries to reach the specific AIDS targets they have set, an investment of \$25 billion will be required in 2010 which is only \$11.3 billion more than we have available today.

As decisions are made in the coming months on budgetary and policy priorities at global and national levels, it is my fervent hope that we keep in mind the enormous human, but also important development dimensions of the AIDS epidemic.

Our investments today to ensure universal access will yield dividends for generations. It will help improve maternal and child health, promote empowerment of women and reduce poverty.

As we move closer towards our 2010 goal for universal access – and as we glimpse the deadline for the Millennium Development Goals only a bit further down the road – let us renew our resolve to put people first in the decisions we make.

The goal of universal access is a goal that can be achieved. For the sake of humanity -- and our humanity -- it is a goal that must be achieved.

Thank you.