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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

Remarks on World AIDS Day

Doha, 1 December 2008

I welcome this opportunity to mark World AIDS Day here in Doha at this important conference.

AIDS continues to be one of the most devastating epidemics in history.

People are still being infected with HIV faster than we can get them on treatment.

AIDS is still one of the top ten causes of death worldwide, and it is the number one killer in Africa.

At the same time, there has been remarkable progress in recent years.

More than three million people are receiving treatment.

There have been fewer deaths and fewer new infections.

This is in no small part due to the successful mobilization of funding for HIV/AIDS.

In the last ten years, total annual resources available for AIDS has increased by more than thirty-fold, from \$292 million to \$10 billion.

I pay tribute to the decision by the United States Government to commit \$48 billion, out of which \$39 billion will be spent on HIV/AIDS over the next five years.

The challenge now is to sustain the leadership that is producing these results.

We have to build on what we have started.

We have to maintain this momentum, especially during the time of financial crisis. Funding shortages could take a deadly toll.

If we falter in our HIV prevention efforts, human suffering will deepen.

And as more people become infected, costs will rise.

Donors and national governments must uphold their commitment to the struggle against AIDS.

If not, millions of people will face devastating consequences.

The enormous investments that have been made will be undermined.

And we will impede further progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Of course, increasing resources is only one among the many actions needed.

Prevention has proven to be highly effective and essential.

As we commemorate this year the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it is indeed shocking that individuals living with HIV are still denied entry, stay and residence rights.

I will work hard to eliminate the travel bans with the concerned national leaders.

The need to lead on AIDS is as real and urgent as ever.

Here in this room, we have tremendous potential to deliver.

I pledge to do my utmost to reach our global targets on AIDS, and to ensure that the issue is addressed in international discussions on health next year.

We must fulfill our commitments to scaling up efforts towards universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support.

We must heed the call for “Universal Action Now” made at the 17th International AIDS Conference held last August in Mexico, which I personally attended.

I was deeply touched by the passion and compassion of the participants, and the dedication of NGOs around the globe.

UNAIDS’ role in promoting the attainment of this noble objective will remain critical.

Today, on World AIDS Day, as we affirm the need for continued leadership from all levels of society in responding to the global pandemic of HIV/AIDS, I am delighted to appoint Dr. Michel Sidibé as the next Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Dr. Sidibé, who is from Mali, is currently Deputy Executive Director of UNAIDS and has worked in the UN for 20 years. He brings a wealth of experience together with a firm commitment to human rights and to greater involvement of people living with or affected by HIV/AIDS.

This appointment follows an open, wide-ranging search process, led by the Co-sponsoring Organizations chaired by Dr. Margaret Chan, Director-General of the World Health Organization, which has included consultation with Governments and other concerned parties through the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board.

I would also take this opportunity to express my appreciation to Dr. Peter Piot for his remarkable leadership of UNAIDS since its creation 13 years ago.

Peter has been at the forefront of the global response to HIV/AIDS and his successor inherits an organization that is well-positioned to lead and coordinate the work of the United Nations in this field in the years to come.

We are at a critical time in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Despite progress in increasing access to prevention, care and treatment, 7,500 people are newly infected every day.

Achieved the 2010 target of universal access to prevention, care and treatment will require concerted effort, new resources and continued leadership from all levels of society – individuals, organizations and governments.

I will count on your continued support in carrying forward this effort.

Your engagement can mean the difference between life and death for countless people around the world.

Thank you.