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Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNAIDS
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PROGRAMME COORDINATING BOARD

Fifteenth meeting
Geneva, 23–24 June 2004

Provisional agenda item 8.3:

Update on the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS

Summary

HIV infection rates are rising among women and girls at a rapid rate. Latest statistics indicate that 50% of those living with HIV/AIDS worldwide are women. Young women aged 15–24 in Africa are 2.7 times more likely to be HIV-positive than are young men of the same age. Appropriate programming to address this growing phenomenon is urgently required. In response, UNAIDS has launched the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS to raise awareness about the increasing impact of HIV and AIDS on women and girls, and to stimulate intensified action at global, regional and national levels.

Action required at this meeting

The PCB is requested to review the attached note and extend its support for the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS.

In February 2004, the UNAIDS Secretariat launched a high-profile initiative—the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS—to raise awareness about the increasing impact of HIV and AIDS on women and girls, and to stimulate intensified action at global, regional and national levels. The aims of the Global Coalition are to increase the visibility of, and forge synergies between, the work of the many NGOs, governments, UN organizations and civil society groups actively working to reverse the rising prevalence of HIV among women and girls.

The Coalition's five key aims

- *To address the increasing impact of AIDS on women and girls worldwide*

The latest epidemiological figures show that AIDS is having an ever-increasing impact on women and girls. Globally, women now represent 50% of those living with HIV. In Africa, women and girls account for 57% of those infected.

- *To help meet a series of ambitious international targets*

The Millennium Development Goals and the UN Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS in 2001, provide a series of progressive, measurable targets to reduce poverty and tackle HIV and AIDS. Many of these targets relate directly to women and require extra effort and attention if they are to be met.

- *To support the global AIDS response*

As a result of the devastating impact of the epidemic on women and girls, progress in many other areas of the response to AIDS depends on what is done for women and girls today.

- *To improve prevention for women and girls*

To be effective, prevention programmes must recognize the realities of many women's lives. Women and girls often have limited access to essential education and income-generating opportunities and can not always choose to abstain from sex or insist on condom use. In addition, they are sometimes forced into unprotected transactional sex to support their families, and are often infected by husbands in societies where it is common or accepted for men to have more than one partner.

- *To address societal and legal inequities that compound the impact of HIV and AIDS on women*

Women and girls are disadvantaged by society in a number of ways that men are not. Women face particular challenges in accessing support and treatment, particularly when violence against them is tolerated, and in protecting their property rights. HIV and AIDS make these inequities worse and life-threatening.

The Coalition's approach

The Global Coalition recognizes that the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV infection is linked to underlying gender inequalities and societal norms that need to be challenged. The Global Coalition is guided by the following ***key principles***:

- Women are not victims and their vulnerability does not stem from inherent physical or psychological weaknesses. The strong resilience of women to persevere in the face of hardship and to play central roles within communities is inspiring.

- Women are leaders in many areas of the AIDS response but, too often, interventions are not adapted to their realities, leaving them at greater risk of HIV infection and at a disadvantage when it comes to coping with AIDS.
- Many women who are infected with HIV—or at great risk of becoming infected—do not engage in high-risk behaviour. They are vulnerable largely because of the behaviour of others, through their limited autonomy and external factors beyond their control, including social and economic inequities.
- Factors that make women and girls more vulnerable to HIV infection can be eliminated, given sufficient commitment, attention and resources.
- Women living with HIV/AIDS have a unique and valuable contribution to make in tackling the spread of HIV and fighting AIDS.
- Men and boys are positive forces for change in improving the situation of women and girls. Efforts to foster more equitable and respectful gender relations, including promotion of new models of masculinity among young men, are essential.

The Coalition's focus and structure

The Global Coalition is focusing on seven areas for action. Leadership in each area is provided by '*convening agencies*' with the technical expertise and outreach to develop inclusive programmes of work, embracing advocacy, research and innovative programming. In most areas, the convening function is undertaken jointly by a UN organization and NGO, although, in some cases, there may be additional coordinating partners. Each 'convenor' has the responsibility to build extensive partnerships for action at global and regional levels.

Coordination of the Global Coalition is light, dynamic and evolving alongside the needs of its partners. Overall direction and guidance of the Coalition is provided by a high-level Steering Committee that meets once a year and includes 25–30 leaders from a range of constituencies and professional backgrounds. Strategic management of the Global Coalition is provided by the UNAIDS Secretariat in Geneva. The UNAIDS Secretariat has built a website (www.womenandaids.org) that showcases information about the Global Coalition.

Action Areas	**Convening Agencies***
• **Preventing** HIV infection among adolescent girls, focusing on reproductive health care	UNFPA/YWCA/ IPPF
• **Reducing** violence against women	WHO
• **Protecting** the property and inheritance rights of women and girls	ICRW
• **Ensuring** equal access by women and girls to care and treatment	ICW/WHO
• **Supporting** improved community-based care	UNIFEM
• **Promoting** access to prevention options for women, including the female condom and microbicides	IPM/GCM
• **Supporting** ongoing efforts towards universal education for girls	UNICEF

Regional initiatives

Part of the strategy of the Global Coalition is to catalyse action and intensify advocacy at subregional level. To date, the subregional initiatives include the following:

The Secretary-General's Task Force on Women, Girls and AIDS in Southern Africa, which, under the leadership of Carol Bellamy (Executive Director of UNICEF), examined the impact of HIV/AIDS on women and girls in nine of the most affected countries in the region. Around 57% of

those infected with HIV in Southern Africa are women, and disparities between infection rates of adolescent girls and boys aged 15–24 are striking, with girls 2.7 times more likely to become infected. The report of the Secretary-General's Task Force, which explores actions required at national level to address these trends, will be formally launched on 28 June 2004.

UNIFEM, UNAIDS and leading women's organizations in the six Mekong countries launched *The Mekong Initiative* on International Women's Day to increase advocacy and programming around women and AIDS,

* ICRW: International Center for Research on Women. World YWCA: World Young Women's Christian Association. IPPF: International Planned Parenthood Federation. ICW: International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS. IPM: International Partnership on Microbicides. GCM: Global Campaign on Microbicides.

focusing on issues such as sex work, migration, violence against women, and the need for better access to reproductive health services for adolescent girls. In March 2004, the Lao Women's Union presented a strategic plan to the Deputy Prime Minister to address factors that increase women's vulnerability to HIV. UNIFEM will be following up in China, Cambodia, Thailand and Viet Nam.

The Middle East region has expressed an interest in launching a subregional initiative to highlight the vulnerabilities of women and girls to the spread of HIV. This will be launched in the autumn of 2004.

Expected outputs of the Global Coalition for 2004

Global, regional and national advocacy

- Develop core messages for use by opinion-leaders (including Steering Committee members, UN Special Envoys, celebrities, politicians and civil society leaders)
- Mobilize UN Theme Groups on HIV/AIDS, working with governments at country level to ensure that National AIDS Plans include a strong gender focus
- Link with parliamentarians and religious leaders to educate and advocate
- Amplify advocacy from the UN system, particularly through the efforts of the Executive Director of UNAIDS and the UN Secretary-General

A press release and Op-Ed on these issues, coinciding with the first Steering Committee meeting in London, have already been issued and received notable media coverage. These may be found on www.womenandaids.org.

Links with existing and new leadership initiatives

- Work with the Council of World Women Leaders to create networks of women leaders
- Work with regional leadership networks such as the Asia-Pacific Leadership Forum and the Southern African Development Community

Marshalling the evidence base

- *WHO Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence in 8 Countries, expected November 2004:* These studies, a collaboration between WHO's Department of Women's Health, the Programme for Appropriate Technology and Health (PATH) and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, document the prevalence of different forms of violence against women, strategies to address this violence, and the health consequences of

violence, particularly in relation to the ability to control one's sexuality. The study uses a rigorous and uniform methodology to ensure reliable estimates that are comparable across countries. Studies have been conducted in Bangladesh, Brazil, Japan, Namibia, Peru, Samoa, Thailand and the United Republic of Tanzania. The methodology has also been used in Chile, China, Ethiopia and Indonesia.

- *Property and inheritance rights in East and Southern Africa and East and South Asia*: ICRW has commissioned a background paper surveying the literature on women's land and housing rights in the context of HIV/AIDS. This includes a survey of over 100 NGOs to learn about activities in the field and what approaches are working. To date, the mapping has revealed that organizations in sub-Saharan Africa are developing a number of approaches to protecting women's property rights and are making the connections with HIV. By contrast, far fewer organizations in South Asia are making the same links. This work will help to strengthen the evidence base on the impact of women's property and inheritance rights and to reinforce the case for increased national programming to address these issues.
- *Special Report on Girls' Education and HIV/AIDS:* UNICEF will bring together in one publication new data on the links between HIV and education for girls. The report will include recently analysed data from nationally-representative population-based surveys such as the Demographic Health Survey (DHS) and the UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS). It will highlight lessons learned from experiences with interventions that support girls' education and HIV prevention, such as life skills education, school fee abolition, reducing violence in and around schools, and school food and nutrition programmes. Evidence in the report will be useful to support programming at national level. Publication is expected in November 2004.
- *A guide for policy-makers on participation of HIV-positive women in the formulation of national and global policies on HIV/AIDS*. Production of this guide will be undertaken by the International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS (ICW)

Stimulating action and highlighting good practice

- Support innovative action by governments and NGOs at country level; convening agencies in the areas of community-based care, property rights and violence will provide funding to broad networks of NGOs whose programmes are helping to address gender inequalities at community level
- Collect and publish good practices to document what is working and bring attention to action already under way

Monitoring the global response

- Review progress towards reaching the UNGASS targets specifically addressing women and AIDS
- Undertake an audit of national AIDS plans to analyse programmes and budgets focused on women and AIDS

Next steps

While the task of addressing the gender dynamics driving the epidemic is complex and long-term, the Global Coalition will catalyse concrete action to make a measurable difference to the lives of women and girls. UNAIDS and its partners will use the opportunity of the 2004 World AIDS Campaign to draw attention to the impact of the epidemic on women and AIDS. This will culminate in the celebration of World AIDS Day, in the context of which the achievements of the first 12 months of the Global Coalition will be reviewed by the PCB in December 2004.