

NORDIC COUNTRIES' COMMITMENT TO AIDS UNRELENTING, SAYS UNAIDS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Nordic funding to fight AIDS globally ranks among top 5 in donor spending

Oslo, 19 April 2004 – The Nordic countries' commitment to the fight against AIDS has been unrelenting over the past few years in the face of the devastating epidemic. "The solidarity of the Nordic countries in responding to AIDS is unprecedented," said Dr Peter Piot, UNAIDS Executive Director, during today's fifth UNAIDS consultation with Nordic governments, hosted this year by the Norwegian government. "By making AIDS a top political priority, the Nordic countries have shown implacable leadership in providing the urgently needed commitment and resources to support developing countries in mounting effective AIDS strategies."

The Nordic countries' total contributions to fight AIDS globally rank among the top five in donor spending. Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden also make up close to 30% of all donor contributions to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), totalling US\$54 million during the 2002-2003 biennium.

Dr Piot is in Oslo to meet Nordic governments and provide an update on the state of the AIDS epidemic, focusing specifically on the progress made over the past year with regards to AIDS funding, political commitment and access to HIV prevention and treatment services in developing countries. "The reality is that new HIV infections continue to grow as prevention efforts remain small-scale and as treatment remains out of reach for the large majority of people living with HIV," said Dr Piot. "A particular concern the Nordic governments and I will discuss is the increased feminization of the epidemic as more women become infected. In 2003, half of the people living with HIV worldwide were women."

Because of gender inequality, women bear a disproportionate share of the burden of AIDS care and often face greater stigma and discrimination. In Africa, 60% of those infected with HIV are women. In poor households, the presence of an AIDS patient can absorb a third of all household labour, most of it by women. "HIV prevention fails women and girls all too often," Dr Piot added. "Faced with a lack of social and economic power, many women and girls are unable to negotiate relationships based on abstinence, faithfulness and condom use."

In order to address the inequalities faced by women and reduce their vulnerability to HIV, UNAIDS recently launched the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS -- an informal network of activists, government representatives, celebrities, and community workers who are committed to improving the lives of women and girls.

The UNAIDS consultation is part of an ongoing process to further strengthen our continuing partnership with the Nordic countries in the fight against AIDS.

For more information, please contact Dominique De Santis, UNAIDS, Geneva, (+41 22) 791 4509. You may also visit the UNAIDS website, www.unaids.org, for more information about the programme.

