

LONGER TERM VISION CRITICAL TO REAL SUCCESS IN GLOBAL AIDS RESPONSE

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 26 July 2005 – Real success in the global response to the epidemic can only be achieved if a long-term horizon is integrated fully into AIDS planning and actions, said the Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) today.

“As we take emergency actions to ensure universal access to HIV prevention and treatment, we must also establish systems critical to achieving longer-term solutions, such as a vaccine and microbicides,” said Dr Peter Piot. “We need to ask if our planning will make a difference in five years – as well as in 20 years.”

Dr Piot is attending the 3rd International AIDS Conference on HIV Pathogenesis and Treatment, being held in Rio de Janeiro from 24-27 July. The biannual conference brings together leading scientists, public health experts and clinicians to examine the latest scientific developments – and continuing challenges – in the global response to AIDS. Dr Piot will deliver the closing plenary lecture entitled, “The status of the response: What will it take to turn the epidemic around?”

While in Brazil, Dr Piot will also meet with government officials as well as civil society groups. Both public and private sectors have contributed to the country’s pioneering response to the epidemic through strong political leadership, innovative prevention policies, treatment scale up and bold advocacy to break down barriers of stigma and discrimination.

Brazil was the first developing country to achieve universal access to HIV treatment, as well as prevention and diagnosis services. The government guarantees access to free antiretroviral therapy to anyone with advanced HIV infection requiring treatment. Today, all 158,000 people in need are receiving free treatment through the national public health system.

The country has now reached a next phase in the response where it must address new and complex challenges related to the future sustainability of its extensive AIDS programme. Longer term solutions to issues such as meeting the need for next-generation antiretroviral therapy, improving public access to AIDS drugs and related services through expanded delivery systems and ensuring that increased funding is spent effectively are critical.

“Brazil has long played a leading role in the AIDS response,” said Dr Piot. “The international community will continue to learn by Brazil’s example”.