

THE CONDOM SHORTAGE IN UGANDA

**Statement by
the Chair of the United Nations Theme Group on HIV/AIDS**

**Issued by M. Mogwanja,
UN Resident Coordinator, a.i., Uganda**

Kampala, 2 September 2005

The UN system in Uganda supports the Uganda government policy on prevention of HIV/AIDS including the use of the triple strategy of Abstinence; Faithfulness; and correct and consistent Condom usage (the so-called ABC strategy). The UN system position is that condoms are one of the effective prevention tools in reducing HIV infection rates in Uganda. The UN Theme Group on HIV/AIDS in Uganda has worked closely with other development partners in the last few months to ensure that Uganda's long standing policy of condom promotion is supported.

There has been a shortage of condoms in Uganda over the period late 2004 to early 2005. Late in 2004, some batches of the "Engabu" brand condoms (distributed by the public sector) were recalled by the Ministry of Health following concerns about their quality. The UN system, through UNFPA, coordinated emergency meetings of development partners in order to mobilise resources for emergency procurement of condoms. In addition, the UN contributed to assisting the Government to develop an emergency plan to address the entire crisis. Consequently, financial resources were mobilized from DFID (UK), SIDA (Sweden), DANIDA (Denmark) and DCI (Ireland) to procure 20 million condoms, which are being distributed now. The UN system has continued to work closely with and provide technical support to the Ministry of Health's condom coordination committee in developing a distribution plan and at the same time to build the capacity of the Ministry of Health to develop systems and institutional mechanisms to ensure the continuous availability of condoms.

The UN system has also been directly involved in the procurement of condoms. UNFPA has directly procured 18 million condoms which are already in the country. In addition, the UN system is involved in the on-going discussions with the Global Fund for AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM) in Geneva to ensure that the suspension of the GFATM disbursements to Uganda does not affect the delivery of 76 million "Life Guard" condoms ordered with GFATM funds, with 55 million for the public sector (distributed at no cost to the user) and 21 million for the social marketing sector. The condom coordination committee has also endorsed the procurement of 34 million condoms ordered by USAID, of which 23 million will be for the public sector and 11 million for the social marketing sector. The first shipment of 8 million condoms for the public sector is already in the country and undergoing

testing, and the remaining 15 million are expected by December 2005. It is hoped that if all these condoms are delivered in time, the condom stock will last up to mid-2006, based on the minimum use of 5 million condoms per month. Uganda needs 80 to 100 million condoms per year. The 20 million condoms being distributed now and the 30 million in government stores will last up to December 2005.

The UN system continues to strongly urge the government to develop a long term strategy to ensure that condoms are procured and distributed on a timely basis. The UN system is committed to supporting government and development partners to develop a comprehensive procurement and distribution plan so that similar problems do not arise in future. This plan will also tackle issues related to post shipment testing that is still very slow, resulting in delays in releasing condoms already arrived in Uganda.

In the last one year, there have been debates on the ABC triple strategy in relation to the prevention of HIV infection with a critical focus on how the various elements of the strategy have contributed to the HIV decline in Uganda. The United Nations system has continued to play an instrumental role in providing technical guidance in these debates. Consequently, it has been agreed that a comprehensive ABC strategy will be developed to ensure that all the elements of the strategy, including but not limited to condom utilisation, are accorded due importance. The UN system with the guidance of UNFPA is committed to supporting government in developing and implementing a comprehensive prevention strategy based on Uganda's experiences and lessons learnt from the many years of using ABC approaches to address HIV/AIDS.

The UN system will support government and development partners to carry out public awareness and education campaigns to restore public confidence in and allay the fears of the public on condom security. The UN system calls upon the government and development partners to mount an information and education campaign to the public on the non-branded condoms now being distributed in order to restore public confidence in the use of these condoms.