

The Way Forward

Speech at the African Summit on HIV/AIDS, TB and other related infectious diseases 24 to 27 April 2001 Abuja, Nigeria

by
Peter Piot,
UNAIDS Executive Director

Presidents
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen

This special Summit will be remembered as a turning point in the 20 year history of the epidemic, a milestone in Africa's response to AIDS.

Thank you, President Obasanjo, for having initiated it and for your leadership. It is a milestone:

- because African leaders have said loud and clear, and collectively, that the continent is confronting AIDS ;
- because the tide has started to turn in terms of new infections in an increased number of countries;
- because high level structures are in place by a growing number of countries and resources start coming;
- because care is now irreversibly linked with prevention;
- because vaccine research development is finally picking up, including in Africa.

Yesterday, we heard numerous positive experiences more than from any continent - but you also reminded us over and over again that there is a huge unfinished agenda ahead of us.

We now do have a clear agenda. One guided by the Declaration of this Summit and by the call to action by the UN Secretary General.

It is an ambitious agenda which also captures the complexity of the response, and is based on experience and solid evidence.

However it is clear that every country, every community, must determine its priorities and how to get there.

All of us agreed on What to do, but equally important is the How to do it! As President Konaré mentioned the International Partnership against AIDS in Africa guides us on How to do it.

There is only one way forward and that is the way of partnership.

We in the UN have resolutely opted for the partnership approach, I am talking about UNAIDS which brings together seven agencies (UNICEF- UNDP – UNFPA – WHO – UNESCO – World Bank – UNDCP), and I trust soon ILO.

Mr President,

We heard from the Executive Secretary of ECA, about the follow up mechanisms, and I fully endorse his statement.

Let me now turn to five challenges we all must confront:

The political momentum is there, let nobody question the strong commitment of Africa's leadership to fight AIDS! However this commitment needs to be expanded at all levels in society, and turned into action and budgets.

Second, we need to vigorously address some of the enabling factors in the fight, let me mention three:

- an uncompromising effort against stigma and discrimination as described eloquently by Reverend Gideon. This will require much greater openness as mentioned by President Obasanjo,
- let's become serious about the greater involvement of people living with AIDS (GIPA). There is no way we can win any fight without those concerned in the first place,
- let's intensify our collective work to reduce gender inequalities which are as much driving this epidemic as poverty.

Third, there is an acute need to take our programmes to a scale commensurate with the magnitude of the epidemic, by scaling up prevention and care. As Carol Bellamy and Thoraya Obaid, I would like to mention specially working with youth as they are vulnerable to HIV, but also because we know that prevention works with them.

This brings me to the fourth challenge, one paving the way to go to scale, and to reach all the people in the nation. We need to focus our resources to support the local response as this is where the outcome of the fight against AIDS is determined. This is where the various sectors come together. Therefore we must invest in local capacity development, and ensure that the resources reach the communities and the people.

Lastly, a few words on resources:

- the gap is huge – we fully support the UN Secretary General's call for a fund,
- we need to broaden the resource base across sectors, another reason for a multisectoral response,
- AIDS is a compelling case for revisiting conditionality for grants, loans and debt relief. I refer here to "l'exception SIDA" as mentioned by President Konaré or "new compact" as mentioned by K. Y. Amoako. We are asking all

individuals for a personal sexual behaviour change, but I am asking “an institutional behaviour change” from international development organisations to treat support to AIDS programmes as a humanitarian issue.

- One of the most important resources for Africa are the people, and the most under-utilised resource are people living with HIV/AIDS.

To achieve all this, business as usual simply won't work. Let us not fool ourselves, the HIV/AIDS epidemic is here to stay. Therefore we have to embark on short term urgent action while building capacity for the long term.

Mr President,

To end I would like us all to agree on one more thing. AIDS is a problem with a solution. AIDS is a problem with a solution. If we don't believe this we have no chance to win. And if I did not believe this, I would not be in this job.

From now on, the AIDS message for Africa can and should only be a positive one. One of fighting back, one of showing the rest of the world how AIDS can be defeated. I trust that this will be Africa's message at UN General Assembly Special Session on AIDS (UNGASS).

I am looking forward to seeing you all in New York in June. Thank you.