



Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS

UNAIDS

UNHCR • UNICEF • WFP • UNDP • UNFPA
UNODC • ILO • UNESCO • WHO • WORLD BANK

Speech

**Statement at the UN General Assembly
Special Session on HIV/AIDS**

25 June 2001

Speech by

Peter Piot

UNAIDS Executive Director

Mr President, Secretary-General, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

Two paths lead from this General Assembly Special Session. Two possible futures.

One path simply continues from where we are today: an epidemic that we are fighting -- but that is gradually defeating us.

Where already tens of millions are infected, where tens of millions are dying, and where a hundred million more may become infected and die in the future. Where half of every new generation of boys and girls in the worst affected countries will die of AIDS.

These figures are not theoretical, or exaggerated. They are real numbers, real lives. If we continue as we are, struggling to hold the front, but each year losing a little more ground, this is the territory we will stand in. A place of pain and sorrow. A place of unimaginable loss.

But we will also be in a place of collective shame: that together, with all of our resources, all of our wealth, we will have failed to protect the vulnerable. Have failed to care for the sick, to protect the orphaned, to stop the dying.

This is one path that leads from this Special Session.

But there is another. We are here today to build this other path. Over the last year there has been an extraordinary shift towards a collective responsibility. In coming here today, the Member States of the United Nations declare their commitment to stop this epidemic.

Those who have been involved in this process know how hard it has been to clear the forest of denial and fear to start building this path. None of us should be surprised. These are difficult issues. The behaviors and social circumstances that drive this epidemic are not easy to understand or to talk about. Many are associated with shame and discrimination. We often exclude what we fear. Negotiating the declaration has required that Member States address these issues in much the same way that communities, families, and couples across the world have had to -- with respect, sensitivity, and compassion. These are the qualities that will need to carry us through the Special Session.

Mr. President, a Declaration of Commitment must lay the foundations for this path and our collective response. It must be grounded in our experience of the epidemic and scientific evidence of what works and what does not. And it must establish goals and timelines. To achieve these goals, we will need to redouble our efforts, and then redouble them again.

This path out of the Special Session must be one of commitment to stop this epidemic. To never give up. To never allow the obstacles along the way to defeat us.

To go on:

- Until no one living with HIV is stigmatized, excluded, shut out;
- Until all our young people know how to protect themselves from infection;
- Until no infant is born infected with HIV.

To go on:

- Until children orphaned by AIDS have the same prospects as any other

children;

- Until antiretroviral therapy is essential care for anyone living with HIV;
- Until an affordable vaccine is available for all.

Is this an impossible dream? Not at all. Over the last year dramatic changes have shaped our view of the possible.

We have seen:

- Major new commitments of resources and the recognition of the need for the urgent creation of a global fund on AIDS and health;
- Unprecedented political leadership, and here I salute in particular our Secretary-General;
- Communities and civil society actors active and strong in all countries;
- Major reductions in the price of HIV drugs;
- A newly mobilized United Nations system;
- And new partnerships with the private sector, with foundations, with faith-based organizations.

We know what works. We know what to do. And with uncompromising determination, we must ensure that no country, no community fails in its response to AIDS because of a lack of financial, technical, and human resources.

Mr President, two paths lead from this Special Session.

The world looks to your leadership.

Thank you.