

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS and HIV AND AIDS

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Geneva, 30 March 2005 - **Chairperson, distinguished delegates**, UNAIDS, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, continues to lead and support the global response to the epidemic, aimed at preventing transmission of HIV and providing care, treatment and support. In this regard, effective measures should be taken to reduce the vulnerability of individuals and communities to HIV/AIDS, stigma and discrimination, through the realisation of human rights, such as the right to health.

The global impact of HIV and AIDS is devastating for all aspects of human life and development, and is especially severe in countries that lack sufficient resources for treatment, care and support. The tragedies we, as an international community, are facing will have dramatic long-term consequences, and they demand that we take concrete action now. Leadership at every level, a commitment to resource mobilisation and a willingness to include all sectors of society have proven to be critical to success in addressing HIV and AIDS.

The world can no longer ignore the AIDS epidemic. Over 40 million people are estimated to be living with HIV and more than 3 million people, including children, died of AIDS last year. Within the next five years, every sixth or seventh child in the hardest hit countries in Africa will be an orphan, largely because of AIDS. The epidemic is growing rapidly in other regions: from Africa to Eastern Europe, from China and India to the Caribbean and Central America.

When countries demonstrate serious commitment to promoting and protecting the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, tackling HIV and AIDS, as well as other epidemics, becomes possible. The present situation demands concrete steps to implement the plans of actions regarding HIV/AIDS that already exist.

Millions of people living with HIV in poor countries urgently need antiretroviral treatment – few of them are receiving it. Without accelerated prevention and treatment, the AIDS epidemic will continue destroying communities, health care systems and economies, placing a shadow upon the future of entire countries.

Two keys for success:

- equity in access to medications must be a critical component of programmes. The efforts of UNAIDS, including our co-sponsors, in accelerating access to care, have helped address the equity question at global level: the North/South divide in drug affordability. In addition, it is crucial to provide appropriate assistance to governments in addressing the equity issue at national level.
- AIDS must be placed at the heart of all development strategies, in all concerned sectors, as a matter of urgency.

Prevention and treatment are two critical cornerstones of the global response to AIDS. UNAIDS encourages the use of effective measures to ensure that appropriate information, education and support are provided at all levels of society, particularly among young people and to those vulnerable to HIV transmission such as women and girls, men who have sex with men, commercial sex workers, injecting drug users, people in detention, and migrants.

Voluntary counselling and testing programmes must be established and reinforced at all levels in order to respond effectively to HIV and AIDS. Although greater focus is given to HIV and AIDS, UNAIDS encourages all governments and the international community to address other pandemics, such as malaria and tuberculosis, with a view to ensure access to treatment and care for all in need. UNAIDS also encourages research and development for affordable and quality treatments, as well as safe vaccines and microbicides, as part of efforts to tackle all pandemics.

UNAIDS urges that the implementation of the WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) take into account the flexibilities and safeguards therein and be viewed in the context of public health and other social interests, promoting access to HIV medicines and the realization of human rights, including the right to health and right to life.

The UNAIDS Secretariat has placed a focus, among other areas, on the equitable availability and affordability of HIV medicines and technologies. It is crucial that HIV-related human rights issues continue to be integrated in the work of Special Rapporteurs and through other human rights mechanisms. The Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion, for example, has stressed that this right is *sine qua non* in effective education and information campaigns to prevent HIV transmission.

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UNAIDS places great value on building and reinforcing partnerships in the area of human rights and HIV and AIDS at national, regional and international levels. UNAIDS recognises and commends the critical role and positive contributions of civil society actors – in particular people living with HIV – in responding to the epidemic. UNAIDS strongly believes that they must be involved in the design and implementation of programmes that stand to affect them most.

UNAIDS looks forward to continuing its collaboration with Governments, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Special Rapporteurs and independent experts of the Commission, and other partners in responding to HIV and AIDS.