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Mr. President, distinguished delegates,

I bring this message on behalf of Michel Sidibé, who became the Executive Director of UNAIDS in January of this year. Mr Sidibé is presently in New York participating in the Commission on the Status of Women and sends his regrets for this High Level Segment of the Council.

Today – in March 2009 – we are 21 months away from the end dates of an important human rights commitment. That is the commitment made by governments in 2006 to “scale up nationally driven ...sustainable responses...towards the goal of universal access to comprehensive HIV prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010”.<sup>1</sup> We come here asking for your leadership towards realizing *universal access* as a critical human rights imperative. Lives depend on your commitment and action.

In recent years, important gains have been made in the response to HIV – gains we must build upon and enlarge. The annual number of new HIV infections has fallen to 2.7 million in 2007, from 3 million in 2005. Nearly four million people are on antiretroviral treatment.

If we build on momentum, universal access is a goal within reach.

Using the universal access targets that countries have set for themselves - by 2010:

- 6.7 million people would be on HIV treatment
- 70 million pregnant women would receive HIV testing and counselling, and those testing positive would receive services to prevent the transmission of HIV to their infants
- HIV prevention services would be provided to 20 million men who have sex with men, 7 million sex workers and 10 million people who inject drugs
- 2.1 million people would be treated for opportunistic infections and would receive palliative care

Through these actions, an estimated 1.3 million deaths would be averted.

However, universal access is about more than treatment, condoms and harm reduction in the context of injecting drug use – as essential as these are. Governments also committed themselves to protect the human rights of those vulnerable to HIV infection or living with HIV.<sup>2</sup>

To do this they must:

- End the deeply entrenched discrimination faced by people living with HIV
- End the gender inequality and violence against women and girls that increase their vulnerability to infection and to the impact of AIDS
- End the punitive laws and policies that hinder effective AIDS responses, such as overly-broad laws that criminalize HIV transmission<sup>3</sup>, laws that make homosexuality a crime, and laws that restrict entry, stay and residence based on positive HIV status.<sup>4</sup>

Sustaining progress towards universal access requires expanded resources. To reach country-set targets, an investment of US\$ 25 billion will be required in 2010, which is US\$ 11.3 billion more than we have available today. Though we are in the midst of a global financial crisis, the human rights framework should ensure that global health crises, like the HIV epidemic, and other compelling social and development concerns are not the first to experience cuts and retrenchment. Rather this financial crisis should be seized as an opportunity to clarify and adhere to true human priorities – those necessary to protect health, dignity and human rights.

Distinguished delegates,

In the next 21 months, as we drive towards universal access, the response to HIV needs the contributions of the Human Rights Council.<sup>5</sup> We ask for your leadership to urge Governments to take the steps necessary to achieve universal access by 2010 and MDG Goal 6 by 2015 “to halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS...”

Thank you.

<sup>1</sup> Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS (2006). UN Document A/RES/60/262. Accessed on 04/03/09 at [http://data.unaids.org/pub/Report/2006/20060615\\_HLM\\_PoliticalDeclaration\\_ARES60262\\_en.pdf](http://data.unaids.org/pub/Report/2006/20060615_HLM_PoliticalDeclaration_ARES60262_en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. See also the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS (2001), UN Document A/RES/S-26/2. Accessed on 04/03/09 at <http://www.un.org/ga/aids/docs/aress262.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> UNAIDS, UNDP. Policy Brief: Criminalization of HIV Transmission (2008). Accessed on 04/03/09 at [http://data.unaids.org/pub/BaseDocument/2008/20080731\\_jc1513\\_policy\\_criminalization\\_en.pdf](http://data.unaids.org/pub/BaseDocument/2008/20080731_jc1513_policy_criminalization_en.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> In December 2008, at its twenty-third meeting, the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board issued decisions, recommendations and conclusions “Strongly encourag[ing] all countries to eliminate HIV-specific restrictions on entry, stay and residence and ensure that people living with HIV are no longer excluded, detained or deported on the basis of HIV status;” See [http://data.unaids.org/pub/InformationNote/2008/20081208\\_pcb\\_23\\_decisions\\_en.pdf](http://data.unaids.org/pub/InformationNote/2008/20081208_pcb_23_decisions_en.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> In a statement made by UNAIDS to the Human Rights Council in March 2007, the possible contributions of the Council were outlined in greater detail:

- Through the Universal Periodic Review mechanism, promoting accountability for the commitments to achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support, including in the context of international assistance and cooperation.
- Through the Special Procedures mandate holders, supporting them to integrate HIV into their work – including their country visits – and following up their findings.
- Through support to the High Commissioner’s office, enabling her to expand capacity to provide HIV- and human rights-related technical assistance to countries, including National Human Rights Institutions, and to UN Country Teams.
- Through engagement with civil society, hearing the voices of people living with and affected by HIV, here in this room, and taking action on their concerns.