

UNAIDS calls for a virtual elimination of mother to child transmission of HIV by 2015

UNAIDS' executive director meets Ministers of Health and the UN Secretary General during the World Health Assembly in a bid to accelerate progress towards universal access

GENEVA, 21 May 2009 – During the week of the World Health Assembly, UNAIDS' executive director met with more than 80 Health Ministers to underscore UNAIDS' commitment in supporting countries to achieve their universal access goals.

UNAIDS outlined key priority areas in which joint action by the United Nations will make a significant difference to the AIDS response and a positive contribution to the broader development agenda. Realising results in the identified areas will have a direct impact on halting and reversing the AIDS epidemic.

Many of the priority areas call for urgent and effective actions which save lives including preventing the transmission of HIV from mothers to their children and providing ongoing care and treatment for women, their partners and their children.

Evidence shows that timely administration of antiretroviral drugs to HIV-positive pregnant women significantly reduces the risk of HIV transmission to their babies. It is a proven, inexpensive, and effective intervention. Despite this, latest estimates show that in 2007, only 33% of HIV-positive pregnant women received the necessary treatment and only 21% of women in low- and middle-income countries were tested for HIV as part of their antenatal care. Progress in this area can only be achieved by integrating programmes which prevent the transmission of HIV from mothers to their children into the broader reproductive health agenda.

“We can prevent mothers from dying and babies from becoming infected with HIV. That is why I am calling for a virtual elimination of mother to child transmission of HIV by 2015,” said Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS. “This is one of the main priority areas for UNAIDS, UNICEF, WHO and UNFPA to act on.”

Another focus area will be to prevent people living with HIV from dying of tuberculosis. TB is a preventable and curable disease yet it is one of the leading causes of death for people living with HIV. Around 80% of people living with HIV are thought to be co-infected with TB in sub-Saharan Africa yet globally only 2% of people living with HIV were screened for TB in 2007. Diagnosing and treating TB for people living with HIV will be a vital step forward in the response.

The other priority areas include: ensuring people living with HIV receive life saving treatment; protecting drug users from becoming infected with HIV; removing laws, policies, practices, stigma and discrimination that block effective responses to HIV; stopping violence against women and girls; empowering young people to protect themselves from HIV; and enhancing social protection for people affected by HIV.

The ultimate impact of joint action in these areas will be to avert HIV infections and deaths from AIDS. UNAIDS will commit human and financial resources to scale up joint programmes of support, and clear accountability indicators will be developed to track progress.

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UNAIDS is an innovative joint venture of the United Nations, bringing together the efforts and resources of the UNAIDS Secretariat and ten UN system organizations in the AIDS response. The Secretariat headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland—with staff on the ground in more than 80 countries. The Cosponsors include UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank. Contributing to achieving global commitments to universal access to comprehensive interventions for HIV prevention, treatment, care and support is the number one priority for UNAIDS. Visit the UNAIDS Web site at www.unaids.org