

## **UNAIDS/Millennium Villages Project join forces to keep babies free from HIV in Africa**

**GENEVA/New York, 21 September 2009** – The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the Millennium Villages Project are entering into a partnership in a bid to eliminate the transmission of HIV from mothers to their children in Africa. The agreement is being signed at a ceremony in New York today in the presence of leading figures from the business world and prominent African leaders including two heads of state.

The aim of the partnership is to help local governments create “Mother to child transmission-free zones” in 14 ‘Millennium Villages’ across nine African countries. The new initiative will use the existing infrastructure, human capacity and technical resources in the villages, to help rapidly expand family- and community-centered health services to stop new HIV infections among children.

The ceremony is being held under the auspices of President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda and President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal. President Wade said, “I salute this partnership to help protect mothers and their children from HIV. This initiative will mobilize resources and generate political will to save young lives, leading to a generation of African children born free of HIV.”

Also speaking at the ceremony will be Dr. Lydia Mungherera, a Ugandan HIV prevention activist representing the organizations HIV+ and TASO. Participating in a panel discussion at the event will be: the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms Ann M. Veneman, the Minister of State of Mali, Mr. Abou Sow; the South African Minister of Health Dr. Aaron Motsoaledi; and Ambassador Eric Goosby, MD, the United States Global AIDS Coordinator.

The majority of children born with HIV each year are in sub-Saharan Africa, where services to prevent mother-to-child transmission in the region remain uneven. Less than half of pregnant women living with HIV receive antiretroviral prophylaxis—essential to preventing newborns from contracting the virus.

“In the whole of western Europe, there were fewer than 100 mother-to-child transmissions in 2007, whereas in sub-Saharan Africa, there were some 370,000,” said Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS. “We have a major opportunity now to eliminate mother-to-child transmission of HIV in Africa and save thousands of lives each year.”

Prof. Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University, said, “We will work with national and multilateral partners to develop and promote safe, appropriate, and effective models that can be implemented across sub-Saharan Africa. Creating these zones free of mother-to-child transmission of HIV will inform national policies and enable the transfer of these practices for implementation wherever newborns are at risk for HIV.”

In high income countries, transmission of HIV to children has fallen from 25% to between 1% and 5% in recent years as HIV testing and counselling of pregnant women, the use of antiretroviral drugs during and after delivery, and safe infant feeding has become common practice.

Recent evidence from Africa suggest that practical, locally appropriate and cost-effective clinical regimens can reduce HIV transmission from mothers to their children from current rates which are at around 45% to as low as 1%-2%.

The Millennium Villages are a collaborative project of the Earth Institute, the Millennium Promise organization, the United Nations Development Program, and an array of local governments. They operate a model primary health system and include education, nutrition and economic development. The primary health systems include; free services at the point of care; trained professional community health workers; a network of adequately staffed primary clinics; access to a mobile communication network and emergency transport services to facilitate referrals; and a local referral hospital to support second-tier care. The system houses a monitoring and evaluation platform that can readily assess the adequacy, uptake and impact of HIV testing and counseling and family centered HIV prevention services.

The initiative will bring together a multi-sectoral and science-based development and primary health care strategy, drawing on UNAIDS' expertise in community and family centered prevention of mother to child transmission and greater involvement of people living with HIV, to help local governments create "transmission-free zones" in the Millennium Village sites. This initiative is part of the UNAIDS Secretariat and its Cosponsors' business plan to keep children free from HIV, and will help accelerate progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.

The ten countries that are home to the 14 Millennium Villages are Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, and Uganda. The Villages, located in disadvantaged rural areas, are home to approximately 500,000 people.

The partnership signing ceremony is taking place during the Second Annual Millennium Promise Partners' Meeting, bringing together business leaders from around the world and foundation heads dedicated to mobilizing support for the Millennium Villages and achievement of the MDGs.

**Contact:**

**UNAIDS** Geneva - Sophie Barton-Knott | tel. +41 22 791 1697 | [bartonknotts@unaids.org](mailto:bartonknotts@unaids.org)  
New York - Richard Leonard | tel. +1 646 666 8009 | [leonardr@unaids.org](mailto:leonardr@unaids.org)

**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 website at [www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org)