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XIVth INTERNATIONAL AIDS CONFERENCE

Barcelona, 7-12 July 2002

“Keeping the Promise”

**Speech at the Opening ceremony by Peter Piot, Executive Director, Joint
United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)**

Check against delivery

Twenty years into the epidemic, each of us bears painful memories. But we have inherited a legacy of courage in the face of impossible odds. As this Conference begins, let's draw on that legacy to guide us through the next stage of our struggle. A stage where, finally, the promises are delivered.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan asked me to convey the following message: "This conference brings together the world's best thinkers on AIDS, the most resolute decision-makers and the most trenchant activists. I hope you will take the power of your vision to every community on the planet and to every leader of every country. I will join with you and do my utmost to ensure that our reply to this epidemic is urgent, comprehensive and determined."

Kofi Annan has made AIDS a personal priority. So too, have the 30 Presidents or Deputies who have taken direct command of their national AIDS responses. So too, the Presidents and Prime Ministers who will attend this conference.

Their involvement signals a new era: the era of AIDS as a global political issue.

There are signs of progress.

→ There is more money spent on AIDS than ever before – six times more in developing countries than in 1998.

There are more actors than ever. Who would have thought that the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church would want to meet with me to discuss

AIDS? Or the CEO of Daimler Chrysler? Or that a meeting of African Heads of State would be quizzed by a child on why they fought wars not AIDS?

But this is just a beginning. It is now clear that the AIDS epidemic is still in its early stages. And let's be equally clear: our fightback is at an even earlier stage.

Are we ready to meet the challenge? To fight AIDS on the political stage - where struggles over power and resources are fought. Together, we have moved beyond the point where world leaders have ignored our pleas. The promises have been made. Now, they need to be kept.

Governments promised leadership, all of them - at the UN General Assembly Special Session on AIDS last year and in innumerable summits. The pharmaceutical industry must keep its promise to make AIDS drugs available to developing countries at affordable prices. Scientists to work where the real needs are, not just where the money and glory lies. NGO leaders to be uncompromising advocates for all their constituencies, not just the elite. And parents the world over have made promises to their children:

- I will protect you.
- I will give you the knowledge and support that will let you protect yourself.

Break these promises and we lose the trust of those who depend on us. And if we lose that, we lose the fight against AIDS.

World leaders take note: success is possible. Prevention efforts in a growing number of developing countries clearly demonstrate that significant declines in HIV rates are possible. Antiretroviral treatment has slashed mortality in high income countries. Brazil has shown it can be done elsewhere.

So why, 20 years into the epidemic, are people with HIV still the targets of hate?

Why are only 30,000 Africans getting antiretroviral treatment, when a hundred times that number need it?

Why are three-quarters of a million babies born with HIV a year, when it is eminently preventable? Why have we failed to stop the dramatic expansion of HIV?

The answers are about power and priorities. So let us be clear about ours. Prevention and care are complementary not competing priorities. Prevention secures the future. Treatment saves lives and money immediately.

→ No nation would refuse to fight an invading army because some expert argued it would be cheaper to invest in defences against future invasions. It is not a matter of prioritizing lives now over lives tomorrow. Because the quality of future lives depends on the quality of life today.

Treatment is technically feasible in every part of the world. Even the lack of infrastructure is not an excuse – I don't know a single place in the world where the real reason AIDS treatment is unavailable is that the health infrastructure has exhausted its capacity to deliver it. It's not knowledge that's the barrier. It's political will.

→ 10 billion dollars annually is all it will take for a minimum credible response to the epidemic. It is three times more than is available today. Every funder – governments, business, citizens and the new Global Fund need to get behind this target and start raising their share.

The world stood by while AIDS overwhelmed sub-Saharan Africa. Never again.

We cannot stand by as passive observers while other continents repeat history, and we must not fail Africa now, in her attempts to turn back the epidemic's devastation.

For sustained progress against the epidemic, it is time – past time - to tackle the driving forces of global inequity. To put AIDS firmly on the political agenda that shapes the world order – a world beyond just science and classic public health.

International trade negotiations may make as big a difference to AIDS treatment as any number of national treatment plans. Donor imposed caps on public sector spending must not fight inflation at the expense of sustained investment in AIDS.

Middle income countries with a high HIV burden must benefit from the most favourable conditions for assistance and loans, so they don't become 'undeveloping' countries. Africa's crippling debt burden must be relieved – the 15 billion dollars annually that disappears down the money pit – four times more than is spent on health and education – the building blocks of AIDS resilience. Achieving education for all is basic to development and a critical first step to addressing the gender inequity fuelling the epidemic.

So let's make the AIDS response truly political – let's bring forward the day when leaders who keep their promises on AIDS are rewarded with our trust, and those who don't, lose their jobs to those who will. The first delivery date for promises made in the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment is 2003. When this Conference gathers again in Bangkok we will know who has delivered on the first UNGASS promises, due to be achieved in 2003. Bangkok will be a time of accountability.

We did not come to Barcelona to renegotiate promises. We are here to ignite leadership, to keep the promise. We must make an uncompromising attack on stigma – that's not negotiable. We must strengthen the alliance that will deliver an HIV vaccine – that's not negotiable. We must deliver both prevention and treatment at full scale – that's not negotiable. We must find 10 billion dollars – that's not negotiable.

Defeating the epidemic is possible but it is not inevitable. Together we have to make it happen. Whenever and wherever we've succeeded against AIDS, it has been by challenging power and turning conventional wisdom on its head. Gay men and injecting drug users forced their way to the decision-making table. We have done it before, and now we must do it again.

Now is the time for our movement to turn up the heat, roll up our sleeves and deliver for our constituencies. That's our promise. That's the promise we'll keep. That's not negotiable.

Thank you.