South Africa launches massive HIV prevention and treatment campaign

JOHANNESBURG, 25 April 2010 – President Zuma today launched an ambitious campaign that could alter the face of the AIDS epidemic, in South Africa and globally. The campaign aims to test 15 million people for HIV by the year 2011, up from 2.5 million in 2009 – a six-fold increase in just two years. Through the campaign, 1.5 million people will receive antiretroviral treatment by June 2011, up from about 1 million in 2009.

“South Africa can break the trajectory of the HIV epidemic,” said UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibé, who attended the national launch event in Gauteng with South African leaders. “This campaign promises to be the equivalent of ‘Truth and Reconciliation’ for the country’s AIDS response.”

South Africa has the world’s largest population of people living with HIV; an estimated 5.7 million people in the country are living with HIV, representing nearly one sixth of the global disease burden. Some 18% of adults in South Africa are infected with HIV.

HIV testing provides a critical entry point for conversations around a range of difficult issues, including sexuality, violence against women and intergenerational sex. Through the campaign, for example, each individual tested for HIV will also receive 100 condoms, opening a new dialogue about HIV prevention and safer sex across communities.

Prices for most antiretroviral drugs in South Africa are at least 25-30% higher than the average international prices for these medicines – a key challenge in the country’s efforts to expand treatment. UNAIDS welcomes a recent shift in policy by the Government of South Africa that aims to reduce the cost of providing antiretroviral treatment.

“This is the first time any one country plans to scale up HIV prevention and treatment so quickly for so many people,” said UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibé. “I congratulate South Africa on this courageous initiative.”

South Africa funds more than two thirds of its AIDS response. In 2010, South African leaders committed $1 billion US dollars to the AIDS response – a 30% increase over the previous year.

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Leveraging the AIDS response, UNAIDS works to build political action and to promote the rights all of people for better results for global health and development. Globally, it sets policy and is the source of HIV-related data. In countries, UNAIDS brings together the resources of the UNAIDS Secretariat and 10 UN system organizations for coordinated and accountable efforts to unite the world against AIDS. www.unaids.org