

# Message

## Message on the occasion of World AIDS Day

1 December 2008

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**Executive Director of UNAIDS**

This 20th World AIDS Day provides opportunities for both celebration and concern.

Celebration because worldwide, fewer people are being infected with HIV and fewer people are dying from AIDS. Finally.

Presidents and prime ministers, doctors and lawyers, scientists and schoolteachers, chief executives and trade union leaders, religious groups and communities, and – critically – people living with HIV, are coming together in a brilliant coalition that has proved that, with clear targets and strong commitment, we can move mountains.

Over the past five years, close to four million people in developing countries have started to take lifesaving antiretroviral drugs; drugs that didn't even exist back in 1988 when we marked the first World AIDS Day.

At the same time, HIV-prevention programmes have begun to make their mark, with less people becoming infected. Some countries are taking bold steps to meet the real needs of injecting drug users, men who have sex with men, sex workers, migrants, and other so-called "hard to reach" groups.

But many more mountains remain to be moved. Let's not forget that AIDS is not over anywhere. Indeed, on World AIDS Day 2008, there are as many reasons for concern as for celebration.

First because we have to find ways to sustain what has been started, to maintain the momentum at a time of a major economic and financial crisis. Second because what we're doing still isn't anywhere near enough – in terms of both HIV prevention and treatment. Third because it is increasingly clear that AIDS is a complex, long wave event that also requires a long-term response – including action to secure human rights, eliminate gender inequalities, and strengthen health and social systems.

Twenty years ago, some ten million people were living with HIV. Since then, the epidemic has more than tripled in size. And it is still growing. For every two people who start taking treatment today, another five become newly infected. So instead of getting shorter, the queues of people requiring antiretroviral therapy are getting longer and longer. There is thus as real and urgent a need as ever for a brilliant and diverse coalition that is ready to lead and deliver on AIDS.

At the end of this year, I will leave UNAIDS. It's the end of my term. But before I go, I want to thank all of you for your hard work and activism, for your support, and to also reaffirm my personal commitment to remain part of the brilliant coalition. The epidemic is far from over, but together we can make a real difference. We've started now to save lives but we need to save many more.

Uniting the world against **AIDS**