

21 May 2007

**Statement of H.E. Ms. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa,
President of the 61st Session of the General Assembly,
at the Follow-up to the Outcome of the 26th Special Session:
Implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS**

Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

HIV/AIDS is often spoken of, in terms of citing numbers. These numbers are shocking beyond belief but they help us understand the magnitude of this pandemic.

Since HIV/AIDS was first discovered on June 5, 1981, it has killed more than 25 million people worldwide.

Currently, about 40 million of the world population is infected with HIV; about 4.1 million, last year alone.

12 million children in Africa are orphaned by AIDS.

8,000 people die and 12,000 are still infected every day.

Each and every one of these facts and figures tells an individual story in its own way. And when you put these stories together, they reflect unimaginable tragedies and despairs – of those who are living with this disease, or taking care of someone suffering from it, day in and day out.

HIV/AIDS is a nightmare that haunts us all and demands immediate and sustained engagement of the world community.

We are all tested by this crisis – not only in our willingness to respond, but also in the divisions that shape our response.

The response to HIV/AIDS is not a question of either treatment or prevention – or even what kind of prevention – it is all of them combined.

It is also not an issue of either science or values; it is both.

Excellencies,

Our world will never be entirely secure unless we tackle poverty, injustice and inequality. And HIV/AIDS relates to all three. It is a growing problem that will kill more than 3 million people this year.

There is a security dimension to this as well. In the globalized world we live in today, the ability of pandemics to spread beyond national borders has never been easier or faster.

As HIV/AIDS has spread, it has devastated whole populations leaving some countries more fragile and exposed to all sorts of dangers including civil wars.

HIV/AIDS also hinders development. It devastates economies in the developing world; widening even more, the gap between the world's richest and poorest countries.

It destroys hope, dreams and aspirations. And it will kill the future unless we do more to fight it; for we are in a race against time!

Excellencies,

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the spread of HIV/AIDS is most severe. Life expectancy is only 46 years; the region accounts for 62% of global infections, and the majority of overall deaths due to the disease. HIV/AIDS infections are up to six times higher for young women than for young men.

As a result, nearly one thousand innocent children die everyday in Africa.

This can be halted. Better still, it can be reversed!

Excellencies,

In 2005, donors agreed to support free basic healthcare, universal access to HIV/AIDS treatment, and primary education for all. Developing countries agreed to develop national plans to defeat the spread of the disease, as part of their overall strategy to achieve the MDGs by 2015.

Though governments play a central role in the response, they alone cannot tackle this global emergency. Nor can the United Nations.

What we need is a partnership between governments, multilateral institutions, civil society, NGOs, scientists, doctors as well as individuals. Most importantly, we need to engage those living with HIV/AIDS and those at greatest risk of infection – women and children – to be at the centre of the response.

Yet many still find it difficult or embarrassing to talk about HIV/AIDS. Many women would rather not get the treatment they need to save their lives, or stop their children from contracting

HIV/AIDS because they do not want, or do not know how to cope with the fear and stigma of HIV/AIDS.

Only one in five young women knows how to prevent HIV/AIDS transmission; and, less than one in ten HIV-positive pregnant women receive anti-retroviral drugs.

I very much hope that the feminization of the epidemic will be a major element of our deliberations. And, that we can have a tangible impact on young women's lives.

More than 17 million women live with HIV/AIDS worldwide, and an additional 225 young women become infected every hour.

Almost 140 million women do not have access to contraception – so they have no choice in deciding if, and when to have children.

Excellencies,

There are some very practical things we can all do, to make a difference.

We need to establish healthy behavior when our children are young, rather than ask them to change later. Because in some countries young people experience pressure to opt out of education, or to have unprotected sex.

If world leaders honor their commitments and live up to their promises, then young people will have the reproductive health services and information to meet their needs.

Young people also need a good education; when our children are in school they are much less likely to be infected by HIV/AIDS than those who are not. Yet over 100 million are not in school right now.

We also need to remove the stigma that goes along with getting tested for HIV/AIDS. In some places nine in ten people with HIV/AIDS have no idea that they are infected.

As we work carefully to slow the rate of new infection, we must also remember that we have a responsibility to treat the 40 million people who are already living with HIV/AIDS.

We have to work with drug companies to reduce the costs of anti-retroviral drugs.

We have to work with developing countries to help them build the health system that they need in order to treat those infected. This means more resources for hospitals and more training for doctors and nurses.

We need to couple all these efforts with making sure that those who are getting treatment have enough food to eat.

Excellencies,

As the Secretary-General notes in his report, we need a comprehensive approach to defeat HIV/AIDS.

Going forward, it will be essential for the General Assembly to continue to monitor progress and keep this issue at the top of the agenda.

We must constantly ask ourselves: what are we doing to fight this global emergency, and what more can we do?

Whether we continue to act and give the highest priority to this matter; future generations will either praise us, or hold us accountable for our failure to prevent the spread of this disease.

This is a make or break time, but beating this disease is entirely within our reach.

Thank you very much.