



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Brussels, 1 December 2010
16854/10
PRESSE 318

EU statement for World AIDS Day

Today on World AIDS Day 2010, the European Union commemorates the many millions of people who have lost their lives to HIV/AIDS, and pays tribute to the many people living with HIV and people from all levels of society, who have fought relentlessly to bring attention to the epidemic and advocate for urgent action.

More than five million people now have access to effective treatment in middle and low-income countries, a thirteen fold increase in just six years. The biggest progress has been made in the most affected countries of sub-Saharan Africa. Twenty-two of the most affected countries in sub-Saharan Africa have reduced new HIV infections by more than 25% in the past 10 years. The European Union is proud to have contributed to these extraordinary achievements made in the global response to HIV/AIDS and to be part of a collective effort of strong partners such as UNAIDS, WHO, the Global Fund, UNITAID, People Living with HIV and civil society.

Despite the progress achieved, HIV/AIDS remains the leading cause of morbidity and mortality among women of child-bearing age globally. About ten million people in low and middle income countries are still in need of access to effective treatment, and new infections continue to outpace the number of people starting on treatment. Sub-Saharan Africa remains the region most affected, with 22.4 million people living with HIV/AIDS on a world total of 33.4 million, but HIV/AIDS is also threatening many other countries and regions. In particular HIV/AIDS is spreading rapidly in the neighbouring countries beyond the EU eastern border and in Central Asia, where prevalence is rising fast and antiretroviral coverage is among the lowest worldwide, with the number of people living with HIV/AIDS rising 66% between 2001 and 2008. The European Union is vigorously committed to uphold its strong and continued leadership in confronting HIV/AIDS and to ensure that the progress and investments already made will not erode.

P R E S S

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More attention to prevention is urgently needed, combining behavioural, biomedical and structural interventions. In this context, a strong focus on youth is necessary. Comprehensive sex education, access to youth-friendly services, to affordable and high quality male and female condoms and other forms of prevention must be part of our efforts against HIV/AIDS. Special attention to gender-sensitive approaches and to transforming the role and responsibilities of men and boys is needed.

The EU emphasises that HIV/AIDS continues to pose a threat to development and to the lives, health and well-being of individuals, in particular women and children. There is therefore a need to integrate HIV/AIDS and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) into policies and programmes, at local, regional and international levels. The promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women in particular to be able to say no to unsafe sex and protect themselves from HIV and other sexually transmitted infections is crucial.

Commemorating the theme of universal access and human rights for World AIDS Day 2010, the European Union reaffirms its strong support for health as a human right and its commitment to protect and promote the right of every person to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. Therefore national health systems need to be strengthened to ensure effective and sustainable health care delivery and public health systems that meet quality and equity standards. However, HIV/AIDS is not only a health matter and requires a multisectoral approach.

Respect for human rights, and elimination of barriers of discrimination, stigma and exclusion are key to the achievement of universal access to HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, care and support. The European Union reaffirms its commitment to EU collective action to promote human rights and rights-based approaches to address HIV/AIDS. Moreover, the EU is committed to support removal of restrictions on entry, stay and residence for people living with HIV as well as decriminalisation of homosexuality, and to remove other barriers, including punitive laws, that hamper an adequate response to the epidemic and to counteract stigmatisation and discrimination of people living with HIV and other vulnerable groups. Key populations at risk must be seen and recognised; their voices must be heard; their needs must be addressed and their rights must be protected. This is relevant for all people, regardless of HIV-status, sexual orientation, age, gender identity, creed and ethnicity, or any other status.

The European Union is firmly committed to support the achievement of all MDGs globally by 2015. The European Union reaffirms its commitment to accelerate progress in order to achieve universal access to HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, care and support as an essential step in achieving MDG 6 and supports the efforts towards virtually eliminating mother-to-child transmission of HIV by 2015. This will contribute to the achievement of the other Millennium Development Goals, in particular the health-related MDGs 4 and 5. HIV/AIDS is a contributing factor to the nearly 400,000 maternal deaths occurring every year, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

The European Union notes the unprecedented amount of nearly US\$12 billion for the next three years pledged at the recent replenishment conference for the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, including for the first time some African nations and private sector partners. However, we recognise the need to further pursue efforts in resource mobilization to achieve the universal access target.

The European Union looks forward to take part in the comprehensive review of progress achieved in relation to the commitments of the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the 2006 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS at a Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly in 2011. The European Union is prepared to reiterate and extend the commitment to universal access in 2015, in line with the commitment to the MDGs. Our commitment will include a set of concrete actions aimed at strengthening and sustaining our efforts and to report back on progress in June 2016.

The EU will initiate a broad and consultative process with Member States and other stakeholders for the preparation of a geographically comprehensive European Programme for Action to Confront HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis through External Action for 2012 and beyond. In doing so, the European Union expresses its strong determination to further strengthen and reinforce its vital and leading role in the global response to HIV/AIDS.

Through the combination of strong and proactive political leadership, better governance and continued efforts in research and development we can progress towards the goal of universal access and open the road to a world with zero new HIV infections, zero stigma and discrimination, and zero deaths from AIDS.