

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON WORLD AIDS DAY

1 December 2009

The world is seeing signs of progress in reversing the AIDS epidemic in some countries. Investments in the AIDS response are producing results and saving lives.

At the same time, in global terms new infections are outpacing the gains achieved in putting people on treatment, and AIDS remains one of the leading causes of premature death globally.

On World AIDS Day this year, our challenge is clear: we must continue doing what works, but we must also do more, on an urgent basis, to uphold our commitment to reach universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010.

This goal can be achieved only if we shine the full light of human rights on HIV. That means countering any form of HIV-related stigma and discrimination. It means eliminating violence against women and girls. It means ensuring access to HIV information and services.

I urge all countries to remove punitive laws, policies and practices that hamper the AIDS response, including travel restrictions against people living with HIV. Successful AIDS responses do not punish people; they protect them.

In many countries, legal frameworks institutionalize discrimination against groups most at risk. Yet discrimination against sex workers, drug users and men who have sex with men only fuels the epidemic and prevents cost-effective interventions. We must ensure that AIDS responses are based on evidence, not ideology, and reach those most in need and most affected.

People living with HIV can be powerful role models in guiding us to better approaches to prevention, health and human dignity. We must recognize their contributions and promote their active participation in all aspects of the AIDS response.

On this World AIDS Day, let us uphold the human rights of all people living with HIV, people at risk of infection, and children and families affected by the epidemic. Let us, especially at this time of economic crisis, use the AIDS response to generate progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. Most of all, let us act now.