
TIME TO TURN THE TIDE

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Mr President, His Majesty King Zwelithini, Professor Coovadia, Nkosi, friends... good evening.

We have come to Durban to break the silence –

To break the silence, stigma, indifference and ignorance surrounding the Aids epidemic.

At the outset, I pay tribute to those who marched this afternoon, to break the silence around treatment and care for people living with HIV.

I have attended all International Aids Conferences since 1985. But *this* one feels different to me. Because this is the first international conference in the south – in Africa. Finally.

Today, there is new hope – we are seeing an unprecedented increase in political commitment and resources to fight the epidemic. And I wholeheartedly applaud President Mbeki's powerful voice here tonight.

There is new hope – because we now have strong evidence that *prevention works*. But we need to greatly expand these efforts, and to give communities the power and resources to respond to Aids.

On the eve of the G8 summit, we appeal to the international community to guarantee that no country should fail in its fight against Aids due to lack of male and female condoms and other effective tools. And of course, we urgently need a vaccine and a microbicide for women.

There is also, for the first time, new hope for access to treatment and care for people living with HIV in the developing world.

We have called on the pharmaceutical companies to put humanity ahead of the balance sheet and dramatically lower their prices... and the companies are beginning to respond.

Together with our UNAIDS Cosponsors, we will utilize existing UN procurement mechanisms for countries that are interested in purchasing HIV drugs at the lowest possible prices, for *all* legitimate sources of supply. We have called on governments and their partners to build effective systems to deliver treatment and care. We have also asked them to explore all options available under international agreements to expand access to life-saving medicines.

And we are hearing and heeding the ever louder call of people living with HIV to place the issue of access to treatment at the center of the world's moral agenda.

In tackling the issue of care, let's not wait for the *perfect* solution. Because I know what happens when we wait – the rich get care, and the poor get nothing.

We need to continue working to get antiretroviral therapy to as many people as possible – but *right now* we need a major new effort to prevent and treat opportunistic infections, for example with cotrimoxazole.

We have the tools. The political commitment has never been greater. But now we need major new *resources* to fight HIV.

Today, we need *billions* – not millions – to fight Aids. We need, at a *minimum*, US\$3 billion *per year*, for Africa alone – for just the most basic prevention and care, before we even consider combination therapy. This figure is nearly *ten times* what is being spent today.

Where will this money come from? We call on governments in the south to invest more resources in Aids. And we call the governments in the north to greatly increase their contributions to fight Aids in the developing world.

But also let's not forget that each year African countries are paying US\$15 billion in debt repayments – that's four times more than they spend on health or education. We call on governments in the north and the international financial institutions to cancel the debts. Now.

Friends, the time has come to turn the tide on Aids here in Africa and globally. Let this be the conference the world remembers for *solutions*, for *mobilisation* and for *breaking the silence*. Because the time has come to *turn the tide*.

Thank You.

Peter Piot