

STATEMENT BY HAIMANOT SENTAYEHU THE ETHIOPIAN TEENAGER'S FORUM

H.E. Mr. Ibrahim Jabr, UNICEF Representative,
Dr. Bulti Gutema, Head of the Children, Youth, and Family Welfare Department,
Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs,
Miss Addis Ababa, Tsedey Tsegaye,
Forum participants,

My name is Haimanot Sentayehu. I am a student who lost both my parents to HIV/AIDS and I am presently living with my aunt. I cannot express to you the bitter sadness that I have experienced as a result of losing both my parents at such an early point in my life, at a time when I most needed their love and care. I have come out in the open to talk about my experience and to teach so that no other child or teenager will have to experience the sadness that I have had to go through.

Today, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation for the powerful teaching words from UNICEF: "youth to youth let us talk with each other, let us protect ourselves from HIV/AIDS". In addition to this I believe that young people must talk to and advise their parents so that they too will not lose their parents to HIV/AIDS. I would like to express my thanks for the opportunity to address this forum made possible by the initiation of six teenagers with the support of UNICEF, thank you for inviting me to speak.

Our country Ethiopia ranks third in the world after South Africa and Nigeria in the number of children orphaned as a result of AIDS. This is a scary fact for any country. Before we get to the point where we cannot sustain things any longer, we young people must fulfil our civic duty by being with the rest of the community. Children and youth losing their parents to AIDS must end with us.

In Ethiopia AIDS is killing a lot of families. AIDS orphans have been created because AIDS is killing the pillars that make up a marriage. In our country Ethiopia male parents have the upper hand therefore they are the ones who have the opportunity and responsibility to get together to find ways to change their behaviour - and that is because it is known that the male parent has the upper hand in the family.

In Uganda 20 % of children and youth are orphans. In our country the numbers are also going up, and since parents are the foundations of the family, we need parents to think about the young ones in their family, we need heads of families to think about and protect family life. The reason I am saying this to you is because a group of us AIDS orphans got a big scare recently when a teenager that we know who had lost her

parents to AIDS also died. When heads of families bring AIDS into the family the harm that is done does not stop with just losing them. The orphans that are created will not have anyone to guide and advise them, and they too will be exposed to danger. The disaster has many faces.

Dear honored teenager forum participants and invited guests. In order to make sure that we teenagers do not lose our parents to AIDS we must talk to them and tell them to protect themselves. We must also protect ourselves and discuss the issues among ourselves. If we do these things we can reduce the spread of the disease. We can stop the creation of orphans. I can see this being done. Parents have to see this issue as their own and must act upon their responsibilities.

Thank you very much.

*For more information, please contact the UNICEF Communications Section,
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