

ORPHANS AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN

United Nations Special Session on HIV/AIDS Declaration of Commitment

The United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS in June 2001 generated an unprecedented level of global leadership, awareness and support to respond to the HIV and AIDS crisis. With their partners, governments attending the Special Session adopted a Declaration of Commitment, agreeing to:

- *“By 2003, develop and by 2005 implement national policies and strategies to: build and strengthen governmental, family and community capacities to provide a supportive environment for orphans and girls and boys infected and affected by HIV and AIDS including by:*
 - providing appropriate counselling and psychosocial support;
 - ensuring their enrolment in school and access to shelter, good nutrition, health and social services on an equal basis with other children;
 - to protect orphans and vulnerable children from all forms of abuse, violence, exploitation, discrimination, trafficking and loss of inheritance.”
- *In addition, by 2005, significant progress will be made in implementing strategies to:*
 - “Strengthen family and community-based care including that provided by the informal sector, and health care systems to provide and monitor treatment to people living with HIV/AIDS, including infected children, and to support individuals, households, families and communities affected by HIV/AIDS. . . .”

The Declaration also asks governments and partners to ensure non-discrimination and equal enjoyment of all human rights through actively promoting the destigmatisation of children orphaned and made vulnerable by HIV and AIDS.

Five Strategies to Protect and Care for Orphans and Vulnerable Children

1. **Strengthen the capacity of families to protect and care for their children** – by providing free basic education and expanding social welfare and income-generating programs.
2. **Mobilise and strengthen community-based mechanisms** – by establishing community-level orphan monitoring committees and community day-care centres.
3. **Strengthen the capacity of children and young people to meet their basic needs and fulfil their rights** – by providing educational materials, life-skills education and vocational training.
4. **Protect and fulfil the rights of the most vulnerable by strengthening the capacity of government, at all levels** – to promote legal reform (inheritance, property, adoption and fostering laws) and ensure access to social services for children.
5. **Create an enabling environment** – to fight AIDS stigma and discrimination.

Institutionalised care for the majority of orphans and other affected children is not an appropriate option. Resources are more effectively used in strengthening the abilities of families and communities to care for orphaned and affected children in their midst. Where institutional care is offered, programs must be developed to integrate children back into their communities at the earliest opportunity.

Principles to Guide Accelerated Action

The need for guiding principles for these strategies was highlighted at the XII International AIDS Conference in Durban in July 2000.

A consensus was developed through consultations involving governments, international agencies, NGOs, community organisations and young people.

These principles are a common point of reference to guide programs for children:

1. Strengthen the protection and care of orphans and other vulnerable children within their extended families and communities.
2. Strengthen the economic coping capacities of families and communities.
3. Enhance the capacity of families and communities to respond to the psychosocial needs of orphans, vulnerable children and their caregivers.
1. Link HIV prevention activities, care and support for people living with HIV and AIDS and efforts to support orphans and other vulnerable children.
4. Focus on the most vulnerable children and communities, not only those orphaned by AIDS.
5. Give particular attention to the roles of boys and girls, men and women, and address gender discrimination.
6. Ensure the full involvement of young people as part of the solution.
7. Strengthen schools and ensure access to education.
8. Reduce stigma and discrimination.
9. Accelerate learning and information exchange.
10. Strengthen partners and partnerships at all levels and build coalitions among key stakeholders.
11. Ensure that external support strengthens and does not undermine community initiative and motivation.