

**Statement by Nils Kastberg**  
**UNICEF Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean**  
**at the Regional Launch of the Global Campaign on Children and AIDS**  
**Central American Presidential Summit on HIV/AIDS**  
**House of the Presidency, San Salvador, Republic of El Salvador**  
**11 November 2005**

*Excellencies; distinguished ministers; esteemed guests, colleagues and journalists; dear children and young people; friends all...*

**On behalf of Ms. Ann M. Veneman, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), I want to thank the President of the Republic of El Salvador, Mr. Elias Antonio Saca, for having included this event on the agenda of the first-ever Central American Presidential Summit on HIV/AIDS.**

**This clearly demonstrates the Government of El Salvador's commitment to children and to the fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic that has struck the entire region of Latin America and the Caribbean.**

**I also want to thank the other leaders who are here, because the San Salvador Declaration that you are about to sign contains a strong "institutional and personal" commitment from each one of you to respond to the pandemic "vigorously, urgently and in a coordinated way". The Declaration also voices full support for the Global Campaign on Children and AIDS that we are launching across the entire region today.**

**We are here today because 25 years into this very visible pandemic, AIDS has a face that we still cannot see, an invisible face: the face of girls and boys, the face of young people.**

**World-wide, every minute of every day, a child dies of AIDS-related illness. Every day, there are nearly 1,800 new HIV infections among girls and boys under the age of 15.**

**It is estimated that some 15 million children have lost one or both parents due to AIDS, but only a tiny percent of them are receiving the care, support and protection they need.**

The magnitude of the problem is staggering, but frankly speaking, the world has done too little – *far too little* – to address it in a responsible way.

Few people realize that the Caribbean Basin region has the world's second-highest prevalence of HIV/AIDS. Twelve countries in our region have generalized epidemics today.

During the hour we are together for this historic launch, at least 33 people in our region will become infected with HIV – among them, 17 young people between the ages of 15 and 25 and two infants infected through mother-to-child transmission. In the next 60 minutes, four children will become orphans due to AIDS and 15 people will die of an AIDS-related illness. And who knows if a child needing treatment will be lucky enough to receive it in the next hour?

Despite the fact that Latin America has the highest level of access to antiretroviral treatment in the world, still less than 5 percent of children in need of medication are receiving it. And what's more, the small number of children who are under treatment rarely receive the drugs in the paediatric dosages and formulations required to be safe and effective.

Seventy percent of pregnant women in Latin America and the Caribbean are not offered an HIV test – this, in a region that boasts prenatal care coverage for more than 70% of all pregnant women.

The campaign we are launching today will help change all of this. It aims to keep a promise... the promise made by all of our countries to achieve the Millennium Development Goals... not only the goal for HIV/AIDS but also all the others on which AIDS has left its cruel and destructive imprint.

That's why we are here today with a simple but powerful message: *Unite for Children. Unite against AIDS.*

The campaign has set four main goals to be achieved in Latin America and the Caribbean by 2010:

1. *Prevent mother-to-child HIV transmission by providing integrated prenatal, sexual and reproductive health services to 100 percent of women in need.* This will require the empowerment of women and couples during adolescence and pregnancy, not only during childbirth. It

also means treating and caring for the child and his or her parents, keeping them healthy and preventing orphaning at the same time.

2. ***Provide paediatric antiretroviral drugs and other specialized treatment to 100 percent of girls and boys in need.*** This will require guaranteed supplies and sustained access to medications specifically formulated for young children.
3. ***Prevent infection among adolescents and young people, reducing the percentage of young people living with HIV by 25 percent.*** HIV transmission is 100 percent preventable. Effective and age-appropriate sex education is urgently needed from the first grade of primary schooling. Information, life skills, services, protective environments are all urgently needed by young people, starting with those who are most vulnerable.
4. ***Provide care and support to 80 percent of orphans and other children affected by HIV/AIDS.*** This will require public policies that provide economic support to affected families and communities; abolition of school and health fees; combating stigma and discrimination; promoting tolerance and respect, and the creation of safe and protective environments for these children.

Excellencies, distinguished leaders: children and young people represent the next generation of leadership. Today their lives are threatened by poverty, violence and exclusion – factors which increase the risk that HIV/AIDS will cut short or compromise their precious, promising lives. In the face of this tragedy, the State and civil society must ensure that these conditions change and thus make sustainable human development and governance possible.

Societies must come together to address this emergency that threatens not only individuals but also the very social fabric of our countries.

Today we have the basic tools needed to halt the pandemic: access to quality antiretroviral drugs for all who are in need... access to education, to condoms, health services, voluntary counselling and testing, especially for pregnant adolescents and women.

Now that *universal access* has been embraced as an international principle – in our view, a *fundamental ethical principle* – we must work together to remove the national and international barriers that still prevent so many people living with HIV/AIDS from receiving the life-saving drugs that can help them live healthy and dignified lives. *Universal access must be the watchword of our campaign in the region.*

This week, El Salvador and its people have graciously and efficiently hosted a gathering that has come up with many innovative proposals for turning the tide against AIDS in Latin America and the Caribbean.

We call on all of you – each and every individual, government, organization, community and network – to join with us in this five-year campaign that we are launching here today to make visible the “missing face” of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Thank you.