

**Statement delivered by Mr. Macharia Kamau, UNICEF South Africa  
Country Representative at the World AIDS Day Event, Ka-Nyamazane  
Stadium, Nelspruit, Mpumalanga  
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Your Excellency, the Deputy President of the Republic of South Africa

Let me begin by expressing our gratitude for the invitation extended to us as the United Nations Representatives in South Africa. I am here today, in my capacity as the Chairperson of the United Nations Theme Group on HIV and AIDS in South Africa.

Deputy President, Ladies and Gentlemen I would like to begin my comments today by reading an extract from the message sent by the Secretary-General on the occasion of the World AIDS Day. The Secretary-General says, and I quote: “In the 25 years since the first case was reported, AIDS has changed the world. It has killed 25 million people, and infected 40 million more. It has inflicted the single greatest reversal in the history of human development. In other words, it has become the greatest challenge of our generation. For far too long, the world was in denial. But over the past 10 years, attitudes have changed. The world has started to take the fight against AIDS as seriously as it deserves. Financial resources are being committed like never before, people have access to antiretroviral treatment like never before, and several countries are managing to fight the spread like never before. Now, as the number of infections continues to rise around the world, we need to mobilize political will like never before.” Close quote.

Ladies and Gentleman, South Africa is not an exception to the trend in the rest of the world. This country has made great strides in the provision of treatment over the past couple of years with 300,000 adults now accessing treatment from both public and private sector facilities.

Indeed, South Africa has had the fastest growing uptake and now has the largest number of people who have initiated ART treatment in the world. In this regard, I would like to commend the government of South Africa for availing over 80% of the resources that are currently being expended on the fight against HIV and AIDS. And I would also like to commend civil society as well as the medical and nursing fraternity for their heroic efforts in responding to the epidemic. Having said this however, the Secretary-General in his statement gives us the following warning: Quote “Because the response has started to gain real momentum, the stakes are higher now than ever before. We cannot risk letting the advances that have been achieved unravel; we must not jeopardize the heroic efforts of so many. The challenge now is to deliver on all the promises that have been made – including the Millennium Development Goal, agreed by all the world’s Governments, of halting and beginning to reverse the spread of HIV by 2015”. Close quote. This warning rings true for all the nations of the world but even more so here in South Africa, which is the country with the largest number of people who are still outside the ambit of the AIDS response.

Deputy President, I would like to make a special plea to you, Madam, that this country make an exceptional and accelerated effort to contain the impact of HIV and AIDS on children. Deputy President, as long as prevention and treatment are outpaced by the rate of infection and deaths, the children of South Africa will have a dire future. Treatment for infants infected by their mothers continues to lag behind that of treatment for adults by an unacceptable margin. Furthermore, the horrific rate of deaths of parents continues to pour even more children into the desperate ranks of orphans. What this means is that prevention and treatment must go hand in glove if the children of South Africa are to have a brighter future.

Deputy President, it is because of this urgent reality that we in the United Nations have, with great hope, embraced your efforts to put in place a new and expanded multi-sectoral National Strategic Plan. It is our fervent hope and belief that this plan will move this great nation from a confrontational platform of reactive crisis management to a win-win platform that strategically models a future where the comprehensive response to the epidemic is based on scenarios that maximize the political will, the energy of civil society organizations, the technical bureaucracy of the government of South Africa and the genius and determination of the people of this great country.

As the Secretary-General of the United Nations has insisted, we in the United Nations must also play our part in this struggle. Indeed, in speaking to the theme of this World Aids Day, the Secretary-General has emphasized that: And I quote “Accountability – requires every President and Prime Minister, every parliamentarian and politician, to decide and declare that ‘AIDS stops with me’. It requires them to strengthen protection for all vulnerable groups – whether people living with HIV, young people, sex workers, injecting drug users, or men who have sex with men. It requires them to work hand in hand with civil society groups, who are so crucial to the struggle. It requires them to work for real, positive change that will give more power and confidence to women and girls, and transform relations between women and men at all levels of society. But accountability applies not only to those who hold positions of power. It also applies to all of us. It requires business leaders to work for HIV prevention in the workplace and in the wider community, and to care for affected workers and their families. It requires health workers, community leaders and faith-based groups to listen and care, without passing judgement. It requires fathers, husbands, sons and brothers to support and affirm the rights of women. It requires teachers to nurture the dreams and aspirations of girls. It requires men to help ensure that other men assume their responsibility – and understand that real manhood means protecting others from risk. And it requires every one of us help bring AIDS out of the shadows, and spread the message that silence is death.” Close quote.

Deputy President, let me conclude by wishing you and the South Africa National AIDS Council all the very best in the coming days and months. We look forward to a process that is open, broad-based and consultative, not only in its strategic thinking, but also in the drafting and execution of the new National Strategic Plan. The United Nations Organizations in South Africa stand ready to do their part, and we are confident that with your leadership, Deputy President, and with the determination of the people of this great nation, that victory over this scourge will soon be ours for all to celebrate.

Thank you