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Statement to the Fifty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women

Agenda item 3: “Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”:

Agenda item 3(a)(i): Implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women

25 February - 7 March 2008

New York

Uniting the world against AIDS

Mr. Chairperson, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

UNAIDS welcomes the focus of the deliberations at the current session of the Commission which calls on Governments and the international community to increase financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Globally, 15.4 million women are living with HIV, which is 1.6 million more than in 2001. Women comprise 50% of people living with HIV globally, yet this masks important regional trends: a majority of adults (61%) living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa are women, and the proportion of women living with HIV in Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe has been steadily increasing.

The links between gender inequality and increased vulnerability to HIV infection among women and adolescent girls are many and varied. Where women and girls have less access to education and HIV information, where they do not enjoy equality in marriage and sexual relations, and where they receive little support in their role as primary caretakers, they are increasingly vulnerable to HIV infection. Research also shows that women living with HIV experience HIV-related stigma more frequently than men, and are more likely to experience the harshest and most damaging forms of stigma and discrimination.

Efforts to reduce the transmission of HIV must address the social, cultural, and economic factors that put women at risk of HIV, and that unduly burden them with the epidemic's consequences.

It is encouraging to note that human rights programmes, such as campaigns against stigma and discrimination, legal aid for people living with HIV, training for health care workers on issues of informed consent, confidentiality, and non-discrimination have increasingly been integrated into national strategic and operational plans on AIDS, and in funding proposals. However, programmes specifically addressing women's rights, such as legal aid services or programmes to enforce and protect women's property rights in the context of HIV, or programmes to address women's economic empowerment (such as access to credit, land, training), are generally less well integrated into national HIV strategies and action plans, and within proposals for funding. Even in countries where women and girls comprise the majority of those most affected, insufficient resources are dedicated to tackling gender norms and inequalities that make women and girls vulnerable to HIV infection and to the impact of AIDS.

There are more financial resources available for AIDS than ever before. We must now ensure that these funds are used effectively to tackle the underlying social drivers of the epidemic, including gender inequality.

In its meeting in June 2007, the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board urged Governments, donors and UNAIDS to significantly expand efforts to address gender inequality and inequity, including through increased and coordinated funding to national programmes and civil society partners.

UNAIDS promotes the Three Ones principles – One agreed AIDS Action Framework that forms the basis for coordinating the work of all partners; One National AIDS Coordinating Authority with a broad based multi-sectoral mandate; and One agreed M&E Framework for overall national monitoring and evaluation – to achieve the most effective and efficient use of resources, and to improve coordination between development partners. The Three Ones principles provide an important framework for ensuring financing for gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of national HIV responses.

UNAIDS welcomes the Commission on the Status of Women's call to action on ensuring greater and more sustainable financing for gender equality, and wishes to underline the following points:

- National AIDS Action Frameworks are the basis for resource mobilization for the AIDS response at the country level. Gender equality issues must be fully integrated into these Action Frameworks and into the budgets that accompany them.
- National Action Frameworks on AIDS must be aligned with commitments relating to gender equality that governments have made in the *Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS*, the *Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS*, as well as in the various human rights treaties and in the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, and must be linked with national gender equality strategies.
- Women's organizations must be meaningfully involved in all stages of the development of National AIDS Action Frameworks.
- National AIDS Authorities, which coordinate the development, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of National Action Frameworks, should include explicit attention to accountabilities for action on gender within the response to the epidemic, and commit to broad inclusion and participation by all stakeholders, including women's organizations and networks of women living with HIV.
- Funding must be directed to women's organizations, which are often best placed to reach the most vulnerable in their communities. Funding must also be committed to support the capacity-building of women's organisations so that they can meaningfully participate in national development planning and in planning for the national response to AIDS.
- Monitoring and evaluation frameworks should collect sex and age disaggregated data, and monitor the impact of programmes on women and girls, in line with the concept of "Know Your Epidemic." Gender budget and spending audits should be carried out, and accountability for gender equality targets should be monitored.

Mr. Chairman,

On 10-11 June this year, the General Assembly will convene a High-level Meeting to review the progress made in implementing the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the 2006 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS.

By adopting the *Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS* in 2001, the Member States emphasised that gender equality and the empowerment of women are fundamental elements in the reduction of the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV, and committed themselves to achieve specific results for women and girls¹.

In 2006, Governments reaffirmed these pledges in the *Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS*, and committed to scale up nationally driven, sustainable and comprehensive responses towards the goal of universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010. Human rights and gender equality are at the core of the concept of universal access, and ensuring access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support for women and girls entails addressing inequalities, discrimination and lack of human rights protection that hinder their access to these services.

UNAIDS looks forward to working with all relevant partners and stakeholders to ensure that these issues are effectively addressed during the High-level Meeting on AIDS in June.

Thank you.

ⁱ *Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, 2001:*

- “develop and accelerate the implementation of national strategies that promote the advancement of women and women’s full enjoyment of all human rights” (Article 39)
- “empower women to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality to increase their ability to protect themselves from HIV infection” (Article 39)
- “implement measures to increase capacities of women and adolescent girls to protect themselves from the risk of HIV infection” (Article 60)
- “ensure development and accelerated implementation of national strategies for women’s empowerment, the promotion and protection of women’s full enjoyment of all human rights and reduction of their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS through the elimination of all forms of discrimination, as well as all forms of violence against women and girls, including harmful traditional and customary practices, abuse, rape and other forms of sexual violence, battering and trafficking in women and girls” (Article 61)
- “review the social and economic impact of HIV/AIDS at all levels of society, especially on women and the elderly, particularly in their role as caregivers” (Article 68)