How the world can conquer AIDS

By Kofi A. Annan

- VIH/Sida - Instances internationales -

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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 become the world's leading cause of death among both women and men ages 15 to 59. 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 as never before, people have access to anti-retroviral treatment as never before, and several countries are managing to fight the spread as never before. Now, as the number of infections continues unabated, we need to mobilize political will as never before.

The creation of UNAIDS a decade ago, bringing together the strengths and resources of many different parts of the United Nations family, was a milestone in transforming the way the world responds to AIDS. And five years ago, all U.N. member states reached a new milestone by adopting the Declaration of Commitment" containing specific, far-reaching and time-bound targets for fighting the epidemic.

My priority

That same year, as I made HIV/AIDS a priority in my work as secretary-general, I called for the creation of a "war chest" of an additional $7 billion to $10 billion a year. Today, I am deeply proud to be patron of The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, which has channeled almost $3 billion to programs across the globe. Recently, we have seen significant additional funding from bilateral donors, national treasuries, civil society and other sources. But much more is needed ; by 2010, total needs for a comprehensive AIDS response will exceed $20 billion a year.

Because the response has started to gain real momentum, the stakes are higher now than ever. 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 governments have made. Leaders must hold themselves accountable" and be held accountable by all of us.

"Accountability" the theme of World AIDS Day on Friday, 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 transform relations between women and men at all levels of society.

What is required of us

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 judgment. 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 âEuros" and understand that real manhood means protecting others from risk. It requires every one of us to help bring AIDS out of the shadows, and spread the message that silence is death.

I will soon be stepping down as secretary-general of the United Nations. But as long as I have strength, I will keep spreading that message. That is why World AIDS Day will always be special to me.

On this World AIDS Day, let us vow to keep the promise not only this day, or this year, or next year but every day, until the epidemic is conquered.

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