

Speech by Dr. Luis Gomes Sambo – Regional Director of WHO for Africa, on the occasion of the

**LAUNCHING OF THE INITIATIVE OF ACCELERATION OF HIV
PREVENTION IN THE AFRICAN REGION
Addis Ababa, 11th April, 2006**

- Your Excellency the Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia;
- Your Excellency the Chairperson of the African Union Commission;
- Your Excellency the First Lady of the Republic of Rwanda;
- The Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa;
- The Director of UNAIDS for Regions and Country Support;
- The Regional Director of UNICEF;
- Excellencies the Ambassadors and Head of Missions;
- Distinguished Representatives of Regional and Sub-Regional Organisations and Representatives of Cooperation Agencies;
- Representatives of Civil Society, Private Sector and Media organizations;
- Invited Guests;
- Ladies and Gentlemen:

HIV/AIDS epidemics, is the major public health challenge in the African region and is a real threat to social and economic development in Sub-Saharan African States. This is the region of the world with the highest number of people living with HIV/AIDS, with an estimate of 2.4 million deaths and more that 12 million orphans in 2005.

After two decades of the pandemic, these figures are not acceptable! Women, youth and population in productive age group, are the most affected. This is translated into devastating effects on demographic, economic, political and social live of nations.

Despite of international commitment and increasing resource mobilization to fight AIDS; even with the current efforts of Governments, civil society and private sector; although the ongoing positive developments brought by the gains of 3x5 Initiative, the current situation and general trend of HIV/AIDS in terms of morbidity and mortality is alarming. In addition to very high prevalence in African countries, the number of new cases in Sub-Saharan Africa was estimated to be over 3.0 millions in 2005.

To prevent HIV transmission is possible! In light of current knowledge on mechanisms of transmission and proven preventive interventions; if we scale-up preventive interventions we will reduce the number of new infections.

We must therefore come-up with innovative strategies to accelerate and optimize prevention efforts in either high or low HIV prevalent countries.

In this context, the Ministers of Health of the WHO African region, adopted during the Regional Committee in Maputo, in August 2005 the Resolution AFR/RC55/R6. This Resolution provided the institutional framework for HIV prevention and called on Governments, WHO, UNAIDS and other Partners for intensified action; and declared 2006 " The year of acceleration of HIV prevention in the African region".

Following the Regional Committee, we organized in Brazzaville, in November 2005 a Consultation among United Nations Agencies in Africa to discuss how to join our efforts and strengthen partnerships to support acceleration of HIV preventive interventions in the African region. The Consultation was attended by Regional Directors and other senior officials representing UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNIFEM, UNESCO, UNAIDS and WHO. An action plan and Joint Declaration were adopted to support preventive efforts in Members States.

In March 2006, under the leadership of the African Union, a continental consultative meeting was held in Brazzaville on "Universal Access to HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, care and support", attended by representatives of 53 African countries.

The Brazzaville Commitment was adopted to guide Africa's contribution to the forthcoming "United Nations General Assembly Special Session" on HIV/AIDS that will hopefully ensure the resources that are required in order to attain universal access by 2010, that would contribute to the achievement of the 6th Millennium Development Goal, I quote " to halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS by the year 2015". Therefore, the current efforts to accelerate HIV prevention will complement the initiative to expand Anti-Retroviral Treatment and enhance the overall efforts towards the Universal Access.

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To succeed in our endeavours, we must take into account the leadership role of the Governments and the following aspects:

1. Improved dialogue and coordination mechanisms among stakeholders are needed to shared goals and strategies, acting in synergy and optimizing resources to obtain more tangible results;
2. Ensure consistency in action, while finding concrete ways of including HIV prevention in the context of other relevant programs and social interventions;

3. Strengthen institutional response and interventions to promote health, to enhance and sustain prevention efforts, taking into account the epidemiological, cultural and socio-economic context of each country;
4. To improve social response through community capacity building, involving community-based organizations, NGOs, People Living with HIV/AIDS, youth associations, faith-based organizations and media, among others.
5. To promote research on HIV prevention, particularly in human-behaviour related aspects.

- Excellencies,
- Honourable guests,
- Ladies and Gentleman,

This ceremony is being replicated in other African countries and constitutes a major milestone in our collective efforts to support countries in reducing the number of new HIV infections.

The successful undertaking of this event has been possible thanks to the leadership of the African Union through the commitment of His Excellency Prof Omar Konare – Chairman of the Commission and his team. I commend and sincerely thank the African Union for organizing and leading this launching.

Finally, I would like to recognize the great contributions of the UN sister agencies namely UNICEF, UNFPA, UNAIDS, ECA, WORLD BANK among other partners. I am convinced that on their behalf I could reiterate our commitment to contribute to Universal Access to prevention, treatment, care and support in African Member-States.

I thank you for your attention.