

Mr. President,

This year marks thirty years of AIDS. Thirty years of saying good bye to loved ones, friends and colleagues; thirty years of fear, discrimination, isolation and destitution. But it also marks thirty years of fighting back, of care and protection; first by pioneering individuals and later by Governments and the global community.

Our discussions this week are suffused with hope and determination. We know that the tide has turned. The statistics tell the story. Globally, the number of new infections per year has fallen by 20% since 1999, and over six million people are now receiving treatment in low and middle income countries – compared to merely a few thousand in 2000.

But the challenges remain daunting. The six million people need to be maintained on treatment for life. Many of these need to transfer to much more expensive second line drugs. Another nine million need to be started on treatment for universal access to be achieved. In the long war on AIDS, some of our biggest battles lie ahead.

Ireland's Contribution

At the high level meeting five years ago, Ireland made a very specific commitment – we pledged to spend over €100 million annually on HIV and AIDS and other communicable diseases.

I am honoured to report that Ireland has kept that promise over the intervening years. Indeed we have more than fulfilled it. In the five years from 2006 to 2010 the Irish Government has spent a total of €695 million of our ODA funds in fighting AIDS and other communicable diseases. In dollar terms, at today's rate, that amounts to almost one billion dollars.

Today, as most of you know, we are facing hugely challenging economic circumstances in Ireland. But we are determined to keep our shoulder to the wheel. In the current year, we will allocate just over €100 million euro of our ODA budget – that is over \$ 145 million – to the fight against AIDS and communicable diseases.

In parallel with this financial commitment, we maintain a deep policy engagement. Ireland is a member of the .7 Constituency of the Global Fund (consisting of a number of countries who have committed to allocating .7% of GNP to Overseas Development Assistance). Last month, we assumed the chairmanship of the Constituency and will hold that role over the coming two years. As Constituency

chair, we have a seat on the board of the Global Fund. We intend to ensure that our voice on the Board is a strong and purposeful one.

Multi-faceted Challenge

This has been a good week in terms of recognition by the international community of the depth and breadth of the AIDS challenge. We are pleased that, on the eve of the High Level Meeting, the Security Council turned its attention – for only the second time – to the link between HIV/AIDS and international security. It is a strong and lethal linkage which deserves continued attention.

We are also very encouraged by the scope and substance of the Political Declaration that will be adopted at this High Level Meeting.

A number of the themes that have been central to discussions throughout our Meeting resonate very strongly with Irish policies: the fact that prevention must be at the core of our efforts; the key role of education; the importance of an integrated response to HIV and the consequent need for all of us to insist even more firmly on One UN.

There are two areas of particular priority for Ireland, which lie at the heart of our response: the particular needs of women, and the human rights dimension.

Protecting and Empowering Women

Let us recognise a stark truth: the fight against HIV and AIDS is unwinnable unless the international community does more to protect and empower women. We know that women are most affected by the HIV pandemic. We also know that women are suffering disproportionately during the current food, fuel and climate crises.

These interwoven vulnerabilities must be addressed in a resolute and integrated way. We look to the newly established UN Women to make a decisive contribution to this effort.

Mothers with HIV are particularly vulnerable to malnutrition. Adequate nutrition for pregnant and lactating women with HIV is crucial not only to improve their well-being, but also important for birth outcomes and the reduction of Mother-To-Child Transmission of HIV.

We resolutely support the goal of eliminating Mother-To-Child Transmission of HIV by 2015. It is a vital instrument for preventing HIV in children. This should also have a household focus – where men are engaged and all members are encouraged to undertake voluntary counselling and testing.

Human Rights Dimension

The other priority I wish to underline relates to respect for human rights and the fight against stigma and discrimination. Ireland unreservedly supports the call for zero discrimination.

It is intolerable that, decades into our war on AIDS, discrimination still persists against people living with HIV, and against key populations. Discrimination violates human rights and human dignity; it also stands in the way of effective prevention, treatment and care. All of us are challenged to work harder for transformation of social attitudes. For our part, Ireland pledges its continued solidarity and support to those whose lives are in danger and are persecuted.

Effective use of resources

At a time of financial constraint, value for money through good investments and improved efficiencies is more important than ever. The UN must continue to lead our efforts to ensure that resources are spent effectively. This means an end to the duplication of effort, a strengthening of coordination on the ground, a trustworthy system of monitoring and evaluation and a single minded focus by all on achieving results.

We must focus our aid on those who need it most and continually monitor and assess the effectiveness of what we do. Only the most rigorous and evidence based approach will finally bring within reach our goal of zero AIDS related deaths.

Leadership

Finally, I want to recognise the importance of leadership. It costs nothing but is vital to our combined efforts. The Secretary-General and the UN system can take pride in the leadership shown to date; it will be even more necessary as we take the fight forward.

This High Level Meeting encourages all of us to re-focus – to strengthen our ambition, our resolution and our sense of common purpose. It leaves us more determined than ever to stand up and speak out on behalf of those affected by HIV and AIDS and those at risk.