STATEMENT

BY

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to the United Nations**

before the Security Council

on the

"Impact of AIDS on Peace and Security in Africa"

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Mr. President,

Allow me, on behalf of the Jamaican delegation, to welcome you most warmly, and to commend the delegation of the United States for having organized this debate on such an important issue not only to Africa but to the international community as a whole, during its presidency of the Council.

Today the Council is taking a new step forward in recognizing the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Africa as a threat to the peace and security of that continent.

The many reports available to us point to one undeniable fact: the AIDS epidemic has reached catastrophic proportions, and has created a serious development crisis, threatening the future growth and prosperity of the affected countries.

As Secretary-General Kofi Annan reminded us last December:

> "Twenty years ago, the global community had not even heard of AIDS. Today, the AIDS pandemic – unexpected, unexplained and unspeakably cruel – presents us, especially in Africa, with a tragedy we can barely comprehend, let alone explain."

For us to ignore the effects of the AIDS epidemic on the people of Africa would be an abdication of our responsibilities. It would be morally wrong. Indeed, the AIDS epidemic is a worldwide phenomenon, having deleterious effects on all regions of the world, including the Caribbean.

- Out of a total of 5.6 million adults and children newly affected by HIV/AIDS during 1999, 3.8 million were in Africa.

- Each day, Africa buries some 5,500 people who have died of AIDS.

- AIDS is now the official leading cause of death on the continent.

Mr. President,

These statistics point to the conclusion that AIDS can no longer be treated solely as a health crisis. As it continues to take its deadly toll on the population, it adversely impacts on the social fabric of society; it destroys the productive capacity of the people, significantly reducing life expectancy and *per capita* GDP in the affected countries.

This in turn exacerbates poverty, often leading to political unrest and violence, and provides a feeding ground for conflict and rebellion.

Marginalized and orphaned children further add to the pool of recruits fuelling violence and possibly armed conflict.

We know that internal political pressures lead to internal conflicts. We also know, that before long, many internal conflicts spill across open, unprotected borders, into neighbouring countries. Very soon, what may have started out as a local conflict becomes internationalised. Massive flows of refugees, many infected with HIV/AIDS, provide even more opportunities for the spread of the disease. The data further demonstrate that the risk of contracting AIDS in a refugee camp is six times more likely than in the general population.

We also know that in situations of conflict HIV/AIDS spreads indiscriminately. It spreads to women, children, humanitarian workers, peacekeepers, soldiers, and rebels alike. The cycle of the epidemic seemingly has no end in sight, unless the world community acts in unison to end this scourge.

We are cognizant of the efforts undertaken by national governments, regional and global organizations, to respond to the AIDS epidemic in Africa; and we may conclude, from the interrelationship between the AIDS epidemic and peace and security in Africa, that the Security Council has a role, indeed a responsibility, to join with these forces in seeking solutions to the problem. We therefore call upon the Council to recognize this relationship in its peacekeeping and peace-building mandates and to seek ways of cooperation with all concerned parties.

Further the Security Council's role in conflict prevention must be enhanced so as to eliminate the environment which is conducive to the spread of HIV/AIDS. In this regard, increased resources must also be allocated to the preparation of peacekeepers, military observers and humanitarian workers.

Mr. President,

Today's debate points once more to the recognition of the fact that peace and security cannot be divorced form the socio-economic root causes of conflict. It further points to the need for greater coordination between the Security Council, the General Assembly, the Specialized Agencies, the Bretton Woods Institutions and the United Nations Funds and Programmes. My delegation wishes to thank the Secretary-General, the Administrator of the UNDP, the Head of UNAIDS and the President of the World Bank for demonstrating in their statements, the commitment of the United Nations family to the fight against AIDS.

The recently launched International Partnership Against AIDS in Africa is a significant step in bringing together governments, the United Nations, civil society and the private sector. The Security Council can, and should, provide the moral and political commitment necessary to garner the global financial and technical resources needed to support the Partnership.

While researchers continue to seek a cure for AIDS, the international community must build on the experiences and lessons learnt from those countries which have successfully reduced the spread of the disease.

- We must remove the stigma of AIDS through public education, providing information on how the disease is transmitted, and changing "at risk" behaviour;

- we must provide public health facilities for testing, particularly for women of child-bearing ages.

- we must reduce the cost of medication and treatment and make them widely available;

- we must provide social and economic support, particularly to those orphaned by AIDS.

Mr. President,

We have indeed embarked upon an urgent mission which requires the full attention of the international community if we are not to lose the brightest and best of an entire continent.