



PERMANENT MISSION OF  
JAMAICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

Statement

By

The Honourable Rudyard Spencer  
Minister of Health and the Environment  
of Jamaica

at the

High-level meeting on a comprehensive review  
of the progress achieved in realising the Declaration  
of Commitments on HIV/AIDS and the Political  
Declaration on HIV/AIDS

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UN Headquarters, New York

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Mr. President,

Let me from the outset align myself with the statements made by the distinguished representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the G-77 and China and by His Excellency Dr. Denzil Douglas, the Prime Minister of St. Kitts and Nevis. My statement will focus on Jamaica's efforts to implement the 2001 Declaration of Commitments on HIV/AIDS and the Political Declaration, adopted in this Assembly in 2006.

The Government has coordinated a comprehensive HIV/AIDS response programme during the past two decades. Despite numerous obstacles and challenges, the HIV prevalence rate has slowed; stigma and discrimination against persons living with HIV and other marginalized groups have decreased considerably; and Jamaica has started to experience a downward trend in AIDS mortality.

Considerable progress has been made particularly in the areas of access to antiretroviral treatment - with over 60% coverage for people living with HIV and needing treatment. Vertical HIV transmission plummeted to 5% in 2007 from 25% in 2004, largely due to Jamaica's robust programme of prevention of mother-to-child transmission. Over 90% of pregnant women between 15 and 49 years receive counselling and testing for HIV.

Mr. President,

Despite our achievements, challenges remain. Behavioural practices such as increased transactional sex, multiple partners, unprotected sex in risky situations and the decreasing age of sexual initiation help to exacerbate the spread of HIV in Jamaica. We remain concerned that women and girls are not sufficiently empowered to negotiate condom use.

The risk of sexual transmission of HIV has been compounded by a dramatic shift in access to explicit sexual messages and material. Despite our numerous interventions, there are still too few messages about appropriate sexual behaviour to compete with the surge of explicit material available for any age group on the Internet and via Cable TV.

The commitment of leaders at the highest level is essential for a successful response. During World AIDS Day 2007, the Prime Minister of Jamaica, the Honourable Orett Bruce Golding took the lead and demonstrated the Government's highest commitment to the HIV response by publicly testing for HIV. In line with expanded initiatives for HIV testing, we have documented significant increases in the proportion of persons participating in voluntary counselling and testing.

Jamaica has witnessed growth in visible commitment from leaders, as role models. Well known personalities in sports, entertainment, business and the media have endorsed mass media messages against discrimination - noteworthy among them the Coalition of Artistes Against AIDS and the Media Alliance against AIDS. The private sector has also signalled its support through the establishment of the Jamaica Business Council on HIV/AIDS.

The National HIV/AIDS Policy and the National Strategic Plan on HIV/AIDS (2007-2012) has been reviewed and approved by government, employers and workers, persons living with HIV and AIDS and other marginalized groups. Our national policy and plan embrace the protection of human rights, including the right to work, regardless of real or perceived HIV status.

In moving forward to the achievement of universal access over the next five years, Jamaica will focus on four priority areas - (1) prevention with considerable expansion and emphasis on vulnerable groups, (2) treatment and care with removal of barriers to access and the provision of free health care inclusive of antiretroviral therapy, (3) developing an enabling environment and human rights framework, and (4) empowerment and governance for commitment and sustainability. The commitment and partnership of all stakeholders will be required to achieve universal access including access to antiretroviral treatment and strengthening the provision of existing care and support systems. We are in the process of reviewing the legislative framework in which we operate, in order to ensure the protection of human rights of all Jamaicans regardless of their beliefs, practices, health or political status.

Despite progress made, a number of challenges still persist. The current macro-economic climate, including rising food and oil prices pose a significant threat to our already fragile economy. For this reason, Jamaica welcomes continued external support for its response to HIV and AIDS while we seek to integrate the response into overall social and economic programmes including poverty reduction.

Mr President,

Let me conclude by acknowledging the important role being played by the UN and its agencies, in particular UNAIDS as well as the World Bank. I must also recognise the significant role of the Global Fund for HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, which continues to support our national efforts.

The fight against HIV/AIDS is not a country-specific issue. International cooperation remains critical to the response. We must continue to place HIV and AIDS within the macro-economic agenda for poverty reduction and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The Government of Jamaica remains committed to the fight against HIV/AIDS and will continue to

provide high level leadership to ensure the success of the response at all levels.  
I thank you.

Very truly yours,  
[Signature]

