



PERMANENT MISSION OF
JAMAICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

Statement by the Honourable Rudyard Spencer

Minister of Health

at the High Level Meeting to comprehensive review

progress achieved in realizing the

2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the

2006 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS

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Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Jamaica acknowledges the considerable investment that the international community led by the United Nations has made in the fight against HIV and AIDS for many decades. Indeed, it is this global support which has allowed countries such as Jamaica to make a difference in the lives of many persons who are infected and affected by HIV and AIDS.

Mr. President,

The progress that has been made in Jamaica is noteworthy. There is an 18 percent decline in the number of persons who reported with advanced HIV and AIDS cases in 2009 compared to the previous year. AIDS deaths have also declined significantly moving from 665 in 2004 to 378 in 2009. Paediatric AIDS deaths also declined by 19 percent moving from 32 cases in 2008 to 26 cases in 2009. The expansion of HIV testing in the Public Sector has resulted in coverage for about 84% of pregnant women and 98% of babies delivered in the public sector.

Early testing has resulted in timely provision of antiretroviral treatment leading to reduced mother to child transmission which now stands at less than 5 percent. Despite these advances, Jamaica faces challenges relating to inadequate human resources to effectively scale up testing, treatment and support services.

Mr. President,

The tight fiscal space, which is not unique to Jamaica, undermines the Government's commitment to advance in any significant way effective HIV and AIDS strategies. The country will need the continued consistent support of the donor community not just to maintain the gains that we have made but to make great leaps forward in the achievement of various international targets relating to HIV and AIDS.

The Government of Jamaica reiterates its commitment to the fight against HIV and AIDS. We recognize that eliminating stigma and discrimination against those infected and affected by the diseases constitutes an unfinished agenda. We are moving to make amendments to the Public Health Act and the relevant Public Health Regulations as one way of moving this agenda forward. The intention is for HIV and AIDS to remain as “notifiable diseases” but that certain provisions in the relevant Regulations that could be regarded as discriminatory would be removed because they do not apply with respect to HIV and AIDS.

Mr. President,

Overturning deeply entrenched biases and strongly held views is a major challenge but the Government must move with a sense of urgency to provide consistent vocal and visible leadership to make a difference. The Declaration of Commitment that was signed by Prime Minister Bruce Golding and the Leader of the Opposition, Portia Simpson Miller in April 2011 is of strategic importance and demonstrates willingness and a commitment at the highest level of political leadership in the country.

Jamaica gives its commitment that that symbolic gesture will be supported by practical interventions to reduce stigma and discrimination and to increase access to testing, treatment, care and support for all persons living with the diseases and especially those who are marginalized including our most at risk populations (MARPS) such as men who have sex with men (MSMs), sex workers and crack/cocaine users.

Mr. President,

Jamaica looks forward to the outcomes of these deliberations and joins the rest of the world in commending the stewardship and leadership of the United Nations General Assembly.

I thank you.