

Statement

For Immediate Release

World AIDS Day

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**Statement by
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Today, on the 20th World AIDS Day, we are again beseeching leadership to ‘Stop AIDS and keep the promise.’ We asked them to do so last year, and we are asking them to do so again. Although much has been done since the last World AIDS Day, AIDS clearly has not stopped. Stopping AIDS is the ultimate measure of progress in the AIDS response, but we must remember that it is not the only one.

We need not look further than the UNAIDS epidemic update which was released last week. Data in that update shows that the global HIV prevalence has leveled off and HIV infections in a number of countries have declined. The leveling off is an indication of progress and therefore points to a simple fact that somewhere, in the AIDS response, someone is keeping their promise.

But still, this year there were 2.5 million people infected with HIV, 1.7 million of whom live in sub-Saharan Africa. Although these numbers are lower than last year and evidence that efforts are working, these numbers are astoundingly high. And as is said time and again, more needs to be done. There are 33.2 million people living with HIV, 68% of who live in my region of the world. This leveling off of the epidemic, encouraging as it is, is still at an incomprehensibly high rate and sub-Saharan Africa is carrying the load.

I sit here with copies of the Abuja declaration, Maseru declaration, Maputo declaration, the Declaration of Commitments on HIV and a host of other commitments that my political leaders in Africa have endorsed and to which we can hold them accountable. But what can you hold *me* accountable for? What promises have *I* made towards the AIDS response in Africa?

I am determined to use my tenure as the UN Special Envoy on AIDS in Africa to work with the governments in my region to make sure that AIDS is a priority and that they deliver on their commitments. Where some are falling short, I will identify opportunities to fortify their responses.

I will encourage governments to make a promise to enforce the rights of women and girls. I will ask them to allocate resources and change legislature to support this promise, ensuring women’s economic independence and their right to education, property,

inheritance and health services. As the UNAIDS epidemic update shows, 61% of all those living with HIV in Africa are women. And 26 years into the epidemic, we know that underpinning this terrible statistic is gender inequality.

I will work towards the meaningful involvement and participation of civil society in the decision making processes at national, regional and continental levels. We know that without the engagement of civil society, particularly groups of people living with HIV, none of the promises I, or governments make, will be realized.

And I promise Africa that I will work tirelessly towards ensuring that all of us on this continent have access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support.

But these are the promises that I have made to stop AIDS. They are also the promises that I will keep. What promises have *you* made?

This campaign asks that you, the individual, make a promise to stop AIDS. It also asks that you keep the promise that you make. You may not be able to change legislation, or affect national budget lines, but you can make a promise to know your HIV status, change your risky behaviour, protect yourself from infection and stop discriminating against people living with HIV. These, I can assure you, are powerful promises, that if kept, can stop AIDS.