

# **AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT FORUM 2000**

## **AIDS: THE GREATEST LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE**

**Daily Report for December 7, 2000**

This report covers the Heads of State Forum held on December 7, Thursday in the morning.

The main themes on December 7<sup>th</sup> was Leadership Consensus and the Plenary was addressed by Heads of State.

### **Main Plenary Report**

#### **Opening remarks by Mr. K Y Amoako, Executive Secretary, ECA**

Mr. Amoako noted that this was the most important day of the conference. We need to finish the work we came to do in the best possible way. We will reach a consensus to turn back HIV in Africa and to move forward. We need clarity of vision. We need a better commitment to:

- Deliver a message of hope and positive action;
- End the stigma; and
- Act as leaders at the local and national level. In the fight against AIDS, we all must be leaders.

#### **Mr Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General**

Mr. Annan started by quoting a thirteen year old African girl, Alexandra. Alexander talks about how her country is dying and it is up to youth to save it because the adults are not doing it.

Mr. Annan congratulated young people attending ADF 2000 for their eloquence and leadership. There are millions more like Alexandra across the continent. She and her peers are the reason we are here today, but they shouldn't have to take the responsibility. Today more people are aware of the impact of AIDS and in caring for those who are infected. In a world where silence is death, let us hear "The Big Noise" everywhere, far and wide. I am coming to bring a message of hope; we are far from powerless. We can even turn it around.

In the face of multiple burdens, we need a complete social mobilization; we must fight the war on many fronts. It is at the local level where the burden is greatest, especially among women. Billions rather than millions of dollars need to be spent. Africa needs to put in place mechanisms for spending these billions.

Above all it is a challenge for leadership. Leadership has been shown to overcome taboos and to raise awareness on the disease. We have seen how the private sector and other groups have been successful in this regard.

Men can make a real difference. When we think about men's roles, we think only of the negatives. Men can make a difference; but their roles have been limited. We should focus on the role of men in political life. Men still dominate at the national level; they must use their to benefit all.

Official recognition of the problem is the first step in dealing with it. The leaders here show that the leadership we need in Africa must flow from within; it cannot come from outside.

The IPAA is an unprecedented response to an unprecedented crisis. It has helped mobilise resources, facilitate access to care. Today the IPAA is officially launched as the focus of the spirit for a new cooperation.

AIDS is a global problem; India, Russia, other parts of the world can learn from Africa's experience. We can be a resource for the rest of the world. The question is not whether more people will die, but how many generations will suffer as ours is doing today. Today he will visit today an Ethiopian NGO that is doing tremendous work at community level. Africa can lead in this crusade and form a learning model that the entire world can draw on as a resource.

The question is how many generations will experience what we experience today? These efforts help stabilize our countries. UNAIDS will continue its mission and there will be a special session of the UN General Assembly in June next year devoted to AIDS. Facing up to AIDS is a point of honour, not a point of shame.

AIDS opens our eyes and arms. We came too late into this strategy; far too many graves have been dug already. The response has been painfully slow, but finally, we are galvanised. Let us make a real difference so that Alexandra does not grow up thinking that we did nothing.

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*In an unprecedented development at such a forum, Mr Amoako led the delegates singing 'happy birthday' to Charlotte Mjele, a youth representative living with AIDS.*

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### **Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, Ethiopia**

It is fitting to make the fight against HIV/AIDS the focus of ADF 2000. I hope we will lay the basis for concrete action. All sections of society must contribute actively towards one objective. Success lies first and foremost on effective and sustained social mobilization. Only then can we expect support and solidarity from the international community.

## **President Yoweri Museveni, Uganda**

The president of a country that is constantly hailed as an African success story in combating HIV/AIDS treated delegates to a journey over the years, spiced with a down to earth commentary on how events unfolded and the reason behind the leadership decisions that he took. The President started by referring to the alarming statistics, particularly the high numbers in SSA. In 1993 1.5 million Ugandans had been affected, Today, 2 million are infected. Out of the numbers in 1993, 800,000 have died and left 1.7 million orphans. At the time, the infection rates in Uganda were the highest in the world and decisive action was called for.

At the beginning, in 1984, he thought AIDS had nothing to do with his country as it was presented as a disease for homosexuals and drug addicts. But the reality of heterosexual transmission meant that Uganda was at high risk. In traditional cultures, sex was treated as a taboo subject and young people engaging in sex were severely punished. The relaxing of traditional mores led to sexual freedom and a vulnerability to STDs. A second danger was the discovery of antibiotics (penicillin) making people not to take STDs seriously.

In finding ways to address the issue, he drew inspiration from tradition. "When a lion comes into your village, you must raise the alarm loudly." This is what we did in Uganda; we took it seriously and we achieved good results. AIDS is not such a serious problem; it is not like small pox or ebola. AIDS can be prevented as it is transmitted through a few known ways. If we raise awareness sufficiently, it will stop.

Therefore we should be able to preach to people about the simple ways to prevent AIDS and we should be able to prevent it. How do you preach? At the beginning, we used advertisements after the TV news. Our ad quietly told people to "Love carefully". But TV was accessible to only a few people. This was a silent alarm. We learned that the best channel for making an alarm are the political leaders. Political rallies are the place to pass on the message (at all levels). Churches and mosques are another crucial avenue for raising awareness. Schools were also asked to pass on the message, once a week during assemblies. Radio was also used to pass on the message, guaranteeing that almost everyone was reached. The language used and the timing is crucial. It must be in the vernacular, clearly expressed and at a time when people are listening.

The AIDS awareness message was also facilitated by the deliberate empowerment of women as part of the democratization process. Women's empowerment was achieved by putting women at the highest level of leadership (ministers); Uganda's Vice President is a woman. This was aimed at breaking the psychological barrier and giving women confidence. It sent a message that girls are not useless. It had an impact on AIDS empowerment; we know that women need to be empowered before they can assert themselves in a sexual relationship.

Positive results as a result of these measures:

100% awareness – people know what AIDS is and how it spreads;

- In 1986, 30 out of 100 women attending antenatal clinics were infected, today only 8 out of 100 are infected;
- In 1986 girls first sexual encounter was at 14, today it is 16 and 17 for boys;
- Sex with non-regular partners has also decreased;
- Use of condoms has risen from 57% in 1995 to 76% in 1998;
- Testing facilities have increased; every district hospital now has testing facilities;
- Since 1990, 450,000 have come for voluntary testing;
- Uganda has set up a state of the art laboratory for drugs testing for Anti-viral drugs (ARVs) and monitoring their effects . “I have become a small doctor myself – I know so much about this!” Museveni proceeded to give a medical lecture on the effects of AIDS and the effects of ARVs.

African countries need to collaborate in the treatment of HIV/AIDS

#### *Care and Treatment:*

Uganda introduced a policy of non-discrimination of people with AIDS. To combat poverty, Uganda has introduced free education to ease the burden of poor families, especially where AIDS has had an impact on breadwinners in the family.

President Museveni stressed that as AIDS has become an ‘African’ disease, we, as African leaders, must take the lead in finding resources and negotiating with drug companies to lower prices.

#### **President Mogae, Botswana**

Botswana is now the country with the highest incidence of AIDS in Africa and is using its best endeavours to emulate the example of Uganda. We have mobilised our best professionals to deal with this catastrophe which is eroding our hard won economic gains. It not only undermines our development but also impacts on our security. Painful as it is, we must admit . At the millenium summit, the President of Botswana devoted his entire speech to the issue of HIV/AIDS. The country is taking serious steps to raise awareness – the president chairs the National AIDS Council and strives to provide leadership. Relevant ministries mainstream AIDS into their national planning, with provisions for special groups such as youth and women. There is a strategy for reaching people at the community level. The private sector and civil society organisations are also represented at the AIDS council to ensure country-wide mobilization.

Specific activities:

- house to house counselling to reach all families;
- inclusion of HIV/AIDS in the school curriculum at all levels;
- voluntary testing and counselling facilities;

- preventive therapy where appropriate (eg mother to child transmission and for rape victims and health workers);
- drugs for treatment of opportunistic diseases and ARVs;
- specific programmes for youth, orphans, men, women and PLWAs;

*What still needs to be done:*

Increased poverty, especially among female headed households, and also increased violent attacks and rape necessitate special measures. Intergenerational transmission has led to the acceleration of the epidemic and interventions need to be targeted here as well.

The whole of Africa needs to take responsibility. We must take the crisis as an emergency and give it the importance it deserves. We need to divert resources from military expenditure to fight AIDS. We need to regard the youth as our greatest resource. I agree with the call of youth to creditors to give grants, not loans for fighting AIDS. But we must be careful not to discourage research on the disease by compensating lead research institutions appropriately. We should be united in demanding a comprehensive care package – affordable prices for ALL drugs required in the treatment and care of our people (not just ARVs).

### **President Paul Kagame - Rwanda**

President Paul Kagame said among other things, that political leadership must be at the forefront of the combat against HIV/AIDS scourge, adding that his country has confronted a unique situation over the years related to the pandemic. He recalled that the 1999 genocide was a deliberate effort to infect people in Rwanda with AIDS and that today the country is having to cope with tens of thousands of traumatized genocide victims living with AIDS.

He deplored the embezzlement of financial resources by people charged with responsibility of combating AIDS, and noted that in rural Rwanda, the disease was exacerbated by external movements. According to the president, the result was that in 1994 just before the genocide begun the percentage of infected people was 2% and 11% in 1998 of the entire population of the country, resulting into 270,000 orphans.

The Rwandan leader informed the Heads of State Forum that as a result of concerted efforts and dynamic leadership a national campaign has been conducted to sensitize religious leaders, the civil society organizations, schools, social organizations etc on the dangers of the HIV/AIDS.

Furthermore, he noted, prevention of mother to child activities have been established, while a National Commission on AIDS has been founded, adding that a lot more needs to be done however.

The President informed the Forum that Rwanda is the host to a Regional Aids initiative, which is charged with monitoring the movement of truck drivers in the region.

On Youth, the President stressed that young people's programs should be geared towards them as they are the leaders of tomorrow and always most vulnerable. He recommended the empowerment of women so as to enable them to play a greater role in the fight against Aids, and added that there is a great need in Rwanda to break the culture of silence and do away with stigmatization and in this connection urged that leaders should become more creative in creating resources, but warned there is accountability in the use of such resources.

## MALAWI – VICE PRESIDENT H.E. MR. JUSTIN MALEWEZI

The Malawian leader dwelt briefly on the question of emergency responses, stressing that national programs should be put in place to protect youth who are the future leaders. In this connection he cited the expansion of education, health and related services, as well as the development of comprehensive youth programs.

He urged the establishment and implementation of multi sectoral programs for the people living with Aids, and in this regard recommended the scaling up of these programs and action plans.

The Vice-President encouraged the strengthening of partnerships, and called upon leaders to ensure that the care package for Aids victims should include voluntary testing, training, drugs for Aids and opportunistic infections.

On the question of debt, H.E. Mr. Mulewezi urged for debt cancellation instead of debt relief.

## SENEGAL – H.E. MR. MUSTAPHA, PRIME MINISTER

His excellence Mr. Mustapha, interalia, noted that Aids control was still limited in scope in African Countries where the pandemic is lower due mainly to poverty, but called for concrete action in order to contract the Aids scourge. He paid special thanks to the UN for numerous efforts and campaigns to raise awareness of the disease in his country.

He recommended access to affordable drugs by people living in rural communities who cannot afford drugs at current prices.

The leadership in Senegal is fully involved in the war against Aids, adding that a National Aids Commission has been in place since 1986 and that Senegalese, such as youth, women, men, traditional healers and leaders as well as religious leaders are all involved in the relentless war against the HIV/AIDS.

### **Stakeholder Questions**

#### **Gender Focus Group:**

The representative of the Gender Focus Group prefaced the question with a statement about the fact that a man was representing the group. This showed a shift in focus on gender issues.

Question : Beyond efforts taken by those in power, what legislative measures have been put in place to strengthen gender equity in the fight against HIV/AIDS in our continent ?

#### **President Museveni, Uganda :**

President Museveni responded by stating that in the absence of a medical solution we need a multifaceted approach to the subject.

Measures taken in Uganda thus far include the following :

- legislation against defilement of minors (18 and below)
- harsh measures against rape (including the death sentence)
- microcredit schemes which aid women on the road to independence
- free primary school education which moves people off of the list of desperation

#### **President Mogae, Botswana :**

President Mogae responded by saying that although Botswana has not instituted any particular legislation in this area, they have women systematically view all laws and traditional practices and proscribe those that impede gender equity. They also have increased the penalty for rape up to 15 years (25 years where the rapist has HIV). However he emphasized that this penalty was not a reaction to the AIDS crisis, but rather a measure of protection for women's rights.

### **Youth Focus Group:**

The representative of the youth focus group prefaced the question by stating the need for children to be seen and heard and integrated into decision-making structures.

Question : Of the 17 countries most affected by AIDS, 13 are engaged in conflict. How can the leaders justify waging wars in the midst of the HIV/AIDS epidemic ?

### **President Kagame, Rwanda :**

President Kagame responded by stating the importance of defining the underlying causes of the conflicts. In the case of Rwanda, there was a genocide and the conflict was an attempt to pursue the perpetrators of this genocide. He asked if we should avoid conflict just because we are afraid of getting involved in a conflict in a situation where there is a threat against humanity. In the case of Rwanda there was justification because they were fighting against forces that were creating problems for Rwanda and Africa. Other wars may not be justified and other African leaders can respond on their respective wars.

### **Prime Minister Zenawi, Ethiopia :**

Prime Minister Zenawi reiterated President Kagame's claim that some wars are justified and others are not. The fight against apartheid, colonialism and unscrupulous dictators is justified. Violence that aims to loot natural resources (e.g., in Sierra Leone) is totally unjustified. The media portrays wars in Africa as senseless, but he suggested that we learn to differentiate and see that they are not all senseless.

Ethiopia was engaged in war for the last two years because there was no other choice. The war squandered resources and lost lives, but there was no choice in the event of invasion. A peace settlement was fruitless and the only language understood was the language of guns. When Ethiopia went into war with Eritrea the army was reduced to 10% of what it was because they had hoped to divert funding to other development causes. However, they were forced to re-arm. He concluded by saying that the youth should not swallow the message that war in Africa is unjustified.

### **President Museveni, Uganda :**

President Museveni stated that he believed there was some misplaced idealism in the questioning of war and that we must distinguish between justifiable (life saving) wars

and criminal wars. He ended his statement by saying, « Don't listen to uninformed preachers who tell you to sleep when you should be awake. »

Executive Secretary of the ECA, K.Y. Amoako :

Mr. Amoako concluded by stating that we must regularize and institutionalize the dialogue with youth by including them systematically in these forums.

**Diaspora :**

Question : Are Heads of State aware of the dimensions of their respective diaspora communities and how they can engage with them on the issue of HIV/AIDS ?

Prime Minister Zenawi, Ethiopia :

Prime Minister Zenawi stated that he was largely talking about Ethiopians living in the West and that there is a particularly large Ethiopian community in the United States. Most are not active in the fight against AIDS, but he knows of some Ethiopian women in the US who are actively involved. This is a beginning for the Ethiopian community living overseas and they intend to pursue the issue in the future.

President Museveni, Uganda :

Ugandans living in other countries are mainly professionals who left during the terror regimes and they are all over the world with large concentrations in the United States and in southern Africa. Uganda implemented the facilitation for these people to send money back to their families in Uganda and this is an important contribution to the economy. In terms of the wider diaspora, i.e., African Americans, the link was good in the 60's, but they have lost that link now. This area needs to be explored. In conclusion, there has been no help specifically regarding the fight against AIDS.

Prime Minister, Senegal :

There are no formal links, but the Senegalese diaspora is very active in helping their communities at home. There is a connection between Senegal and the people who've left in the United States, France, Belgium and the Netherlands. The Prime Minister thanked the group on diaspora that met the day before and asked that a final document calling upon humanity not just to Africans in Africa but to those living outside of Africa.

President Mogae, Botswana:

He stated that he was aware of certain networks of African Americans and they have been participants in dialogue together. In Botswana they rely heavily on professionals of other countries including African Americans and Africans from other countries. Therefore they consider the diaspora as a source of strength and would like more

information about the size and resources of the diaspora in order to explore possible linkages.

**PLWA :**

PLWA have warmly welcomed this forum because it has helped break the silence.

Question : AIDS has two dimensions : the prevention and the care of those living with it.

What actions are you taking to assure this care and treatment for those living with AIDS and those left with it ? What are the leaders of this forum doing so that peace will return to this region ?

**Prime Minister Zenawi, Ethiopia :**

Regarding care and treatment Ethiopia's problem is resources and medication, which is directly related to poverty. Ethiopia does not have the resources and prices for drugs are too high. We can at least provide love and care and at the same time raise our voices on the issue of drug prices. He believes that pharmaceutical companies can still sell these drugs at greatly reduced prices and still profit. We are backing a mass movement to push the issue and would like to see it reflected in the final document.

**President Kagame, Rwanda :**

There are two things to consider :

- 1) There is a need for political will to ensure proper care in addition to mobilization of resources
- 2) implementation of a peace process – Lusaka peace process began the process

**President Mogae, Botswana :**

They are involved in discussions with pharmaceutical companies regarding pricing, but for now they treat all infections for free and provide a preventive treatment for tuberculosis. Home-based families are supplied with all materials needed including food and counselors. They have started using retransmission medication to pregnant mothers. Botswana's major constraint is manpower.

Regarding conflict we are facilitating in the conflict in the DRC to try to bring the parties to negotiating table.

**Closing Remarks by OAU Secretary General:**

This session underscores that we are all involved and have a responsibility. It was a dialogue of commitment and of action. We are all leaders and must take the initiative. We must challenge each other from now on by asking what each one is doing to carry forward the message of the forum. The Abuja Summit will be a crucial point to follow up

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on our actions, particularly the initiatives of African countries. In the words of Graca Machel, let us mobilize, mobilize, mobilize.