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RESPONSES TO HIV/AIDS EPIDEMIC REMAIN INSUFFICIENT

Highly Affected Countries among World's Poorest, With Lowest Levels of National Health Expenditure

NEW YORK, 26 May (Department of Economic and Social Affairs) -- Although countries are introducing comprehensive HIV/AIDS prevention strategies to raise awareness and change risky behaviour, national and international responses remain inadequate to address the severity of the epidemic. This is one of the main conclusions derived from a new wall chart released today by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

The wall chart, entitled *Population and HIV/AIDS 2005*, provides an essential backdrop to the high-level meeting of the General Assembly that will take place on 2 June 2005. The high-level meeting will review national and international responses to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, four years after the adoption by the General Assembly of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS. The wall chart presents the latest available data and information on HIV/AIDS for all countries and regions of the world, with emphasis on government policies and programmes for the prevention of the disease, and the treatment, care and support of persons affected by it.

The major policy and programme findings are:

-- Governments are raising public awareness to change risky behaviours. Approaches include promoting information, education and communication (IEC) programmes through print and broadcast media, theatre, direct mailings and other public service messages. Out of the 228 countries or areas considered, 189 had IEC programmes.

-- However, government responses remain inadequate to address the severity of the epidemic. Despite the comprehensive HIV/AIDS prevention strategies that have been implemented, risky behaviour continues to be common.

-- Programmes to promote condom use are widespread, but supply shortages and poor quality persist. Some 13 per cent of couples in more developed regions use condoms, in contrast to 3 per cent in less developed regions and 1 per cent in Africa. Condom supplies in less developed regions are estimated to be 40 per cent below the number required.

-- Efforts to ensure blood safety have improved considerably. Countries are expanding screening to cover a larger share of the blood supply, and 177 of the 228 countries or areas considered had implemented blood screening. However, national blood screening varies in coverage and comprehensiveness.

-- Antiretroviral treatment has significantly prolonged the life and reduced the suffering of AIDS victims, but access to such treatment remains low. While concerted international and national efforts have slashed the price of antiretroviral drugs, only 700,000 out of the 6 million people in developing and

transitional countries needing immediate treatment were receiving those drugs by the end of 2004. Seven out of ten countries provided access to antiretroviral therapy.

-- Half of all countries have adopted legal measures to prohibit AIDS-related discrimination. Discrimination and stigma discourage behavioural change and impede the treatment, care and support of infected individuals.

Since AIDS was first diagnosed in 1981, the pandemic has expanded rapidly, afflicting all regions of the world. Over 20 million people have died from AIDS and nearly 40 million people are currently living with the virus. In the most affected countries, life expectancy has plummeted to levels not seen since the 1950s and 1960s.

Based on the “Three Ones” principle, governments are creating one agreed HIV/AIDS action framework, one national AIDS coordinating authority and one agreed country-level monitoring and evaluation system. As the Secretary-General said, “AIDS is an exceptional problem that warrants an exceptional response”.

AIDS affects both the rich and the poor. However, the information presented in the wall chart shows that the hardest hit countries are among the poorest in the world and have the lowest levels of national health expenditure. The prevalence of HIV in the least developed countries is nine times that of the more developed regions. The Secretary-General indicated in his report *In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All* that “in the absence of a cure, only the mass mobilization of every section of society — unheard of to date in the history of public health — can begin to reverse AIDS.”

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Population and HIV/AIDS (Sales No. E.05.XIII.2. ISBN No. 92-1-151403-7) is available for \$5.95 from United Nations Publications, Two UN Plaza, Room DC2-853, Dept. PRES, New York, NY 10017, USA; tel.: 800-253-9646, fax: 212-963-3489, e-mail: publication@un.org; or Section des Ventes et Commercialisation, Bureau E-4, CH-1211, Geneva 10, Switzerland, tel.: 41-22-917-2614, fax: 41-22-917-0027, e-mail: unpubli@unog.ch; Internet: www.un.org/publications.

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