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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
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MESSAGE ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD AIDS DAY
1 December 2006

In the 25 years since the first case was reported, AIDS has changed the world. It has killed 25 million people, and infected 40 million more. It has become the world's leading cause of death among both women and men aged 15 to 59. It has inflicted the single greatest reversal in the history of human development. In other words, it has become the greatest challenge of our generation.

For far too long, the world was in denial. But over the past 10 years, attitudes have changed. The world has started to take the fight against AIDS as seriously as it deserves.

Financial resources are being committed like never before, people have access to antiretroviral treatment like never before, and several countries are managing to fight the spread like never before. Now, as the number of infections continues unabated, we need to mobilize political will like never before.

The creation of UNAIDS a decade ago, bringing together the strengths and resources of many different parts of the United Nations family, was a milestone in transforming the way the world responds to AIDS. And five years ago, all UN Member States reached a new milestone by adopting the Declaration of Commitment -- containing a number of specific, far-reaching and time-bound targets for fighting the epidemic.

That same year, as I made HIV/AIDS a personal priority in my work as Secretary-General, I called for the creation of a "war-chest" of an additional seven to ten billion dollars a year. Today, I am deeply proud to be Patron of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, which has channelled almost three billion dollars to programmes across the globe. Recently, we have seen significant additional funding from bilateral donors, national treasuries, civil society and other sources. Annual investments in the response to AIDS in low-and middle-income countries now stand at more than eight billion dollars. Of course, much more is needed; by 2010 total needs for a comprehensive AIDS response will exceed 20 billion dollars a year. But we have at least made a start on getting the resources and strategies in place.

Because the response has started to gain real momentum, the stakes are higher now than ever before. We cannot risk letting the advances that have been achieved unravel; we must not jeopardize the heroic efforts of so many. The challenge now is to deliver on all the promises that have been made -- including the Millennium Development Goal, agreed by all the world's Governments, of halting and beginning to reverse the spread of HIV by 2015. Leaders at every level must recognize that halting the spread of AIDS is also a prerequisite for reaching most of the other Goals, which

together form the international community's agreed blueprint for building a better world in the 21st century. Leaders must hold themselves accountable -- and be held accountable by all of us.

Accountability -- the theme of this World AIDS Day -- requires every President and Prime Minister, every parliamentarian and politician, to decide and declare that "AIDS stops with me". It requires them to strengthen protection for all vulnerable groups -- whether people living with HIV, young people, sex workers, injecting drug users, or men who have sex with men. It requires them to work hand in hand with civil society groups, who are so crucial to the struggle. It requires them to work for real, positive change that will give more power and confidence to women and girls, and transform relations between women and men at all levels of society.

But accountability applies not only to those who hold positions of power. It also applies to all of us. It requires business leaders to work for HIV prevention in the workplace and in the wider community, and to care for affected workers and their families. It requires health workers, community leaders and faith-based groups to listen and care, without passing judgement. It requires fathers, husbands, sons and brothers to support and affirm the rights of women. It requires teachers to nurture the dreams and aspirations of girls. It requires men to help ensure that other men assume their responsibility -- and understand that real manhood means protecting others from risk. And it requires every one of us help bring AIDS out of the shadows, and spread the message that silence is death.

I will soon be stepping down as Secretary-General of the United Nations. But as long as I have strength, I will keep spreading that message. That is why World AIDS Day will always be special to me. On this World AIDS Day, let us vow to keep the promise -- not only this day, or this year, or next year -- but *every* day, until the epidemic is conquered.

Kofi A. Annan