

Impact of HIV/AIDS on International Peace and Security

7 June 2011, United Nations Security Council Chamber

***Statement by Deputy President of the Republic of South Africa, Kgalema Motlanthe***

At the outset, I must extend my appreciation to His Excellency, President Bongo of Gabon, for convening this meeting.

I would also like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-Moon, their Excellencies, Heads of State and government here present and other members of the Council and UNAIDS for their participation in this meeting.

Mr President,

Through your leadership, you have placed before us today, an issue of critical global concern - the impact of HIV and AIDS on the maintenance of international peace and security. Tomorrow, the collective United Nations (UN) membership in the General Assembly will speak in one voice in assessing progress made and chart a global response to HIV and AIDS in general.

Be assured, Mr President, of my delegation's support as well as commitment to play our role in dealing with these critical matters before us.

Mr President,

Although we are faced with such a daunting challenge, it is also fair to acknowledge the significant progress that the global community has made in addressing the HIV and AIDS epidemic.

A substantial amount of resources has been contributed to the research community on various fronts. There have been notable advances by the pharmaceutical industry in research and development of drugs, resulting in millions of lives being saved or prolonged. Moreover, governments have committed themselves to addressing the epidemic in earnest.

Yet, we must face the fact that all these efforts have yet to turn the tide of this epidemic. Three decades on, the rates of new infection still outpace treatment intervention, thereby compelling us to do more.

In this connection, the shortage of financial resources remains a challenge for many developing countries, especially in Africa. We would therefore like to encourage our donor partners to continue to fulfil their financial commitments made at various international fora.

Mr President,

We also share the view that no effort should be spared in arresting the massive loss of lives affecting all sectors of society. It is imperative for the UN system to continue pursuing this objective in earnest. In this regard, the Security Council could also play a role in an integrated manner within the ambit of its mandate of maintaining international peace and security.

We applaud all innovative and collaborative efforts such as those employed by the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations and UNAIDS in addressing the epidemic in conflict areas.

Mr President,

We are mindful of the Charter obligations of the Security Council. In this context, my delegation views vulnerability as a key concern in the relationship between HIV and AIDS, and peace and security.

The infrastructure, health services, and the social structures that traditionally provide support for communities, are invariably destroyed in areas of conflict, instability and violence

These conditions increase exposure to ill-health and consequently could increase the risk of acquisition and transmission of HIV. These conditions disrupt access to basic amenities and haemorrhage fragile public and health systems.

Women and children bear the brunt of these vulnerabilities generally, but more so in the context of conflict and displacement.

Mr President,

The UN would be well-placed to assist countries affected by conflict through peacekeeping and peace-building efforts.

In the short term, qualitative UN peacekeeping interventions should focus on achieving immediate gains that would mitigate the harmful effects of the epidemic. Decisive action to reduce and prevent conflict-related sexual violence might present a critical intervention in an integrated UN strategy.

In the medium to long term, such interventions could take on a much more focused approach. An integrated global response combined with resources and expertise can help countries that require assistance develop strategies for preventing HIV infections, especially amongst women and children.

Assistance in accessing universal health care by improving the health sector and strengthening health systems, as well devising roll-out strategies for anti-retroviral therapies, is an area to which the UN-led global action can add value in reconstructing post-conflict societies.

Joint outreach activities to conflict-affected communities by peacekeeping missions, enhanced political cooperation between the leadership of the host country and local UN leadership and closer coordination with local law enforcement and health agencies could contribute substantially towards critical prevention measures at the local level to contain the spread of HIV and AIDS.

Mr President,

Peace building efforts need to incorporate strategies that address the context-specific needs of affected communities.

These could range from new and prolonged conflict, post-conflict, refugee camps with people in transit or stable environments, the needs of armed personnel, humanitarian workers and most importantly women and children.

These interventions require a vision and commitment that are supported by long term investments by those countries emerging from conflict, supported by the international community. These must be based on the principles we all embrace: Respect for Human Rights, the Right to Dignity, Safety and Respect.

Mr President,

Through your leadership, the Council has added its voice to renew global efforts in combating HIV and AIDS. The resolution that you have placed before us builds on previous efforts by the Council. Such efforts highlight the specific contribution that the Security Council can make in containing the spread of HIV and AIDS within this defined mandate.

These mutually supportive and complementary efforts by the UN system are yet a further reaffirmation of our collective responsibility to combat HIV and AIDS.

I thank you!