



IRELAND

Address

by

**H.E. Mr. Paul Kavanagh,
Permanent Representative of Ireland**

High Level Meeting on HIV and AIDS

United Nations General Assembly

New York, 12th June 2008

Check against delivery

**PERMANENT MISSION OF IRELAND TO THE UNITED NATIONS
885 SECOND AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10017 TELEPHONE 212 421-6934 FAX 212 752-4726
ireland@un.int**

Mr President

I am honoured to represent my country here today.

Ireland has prioritised the fight against HIV and AIDS as fundamental to poverty and vulnerability reduction. We are living up to the promises made at this General Assembly in 2001 and 2006.

With over €100 million now being spent annually on HIV and other diseases of poverty the Irish Government is investing in programmes that are benefiting those most in need; delivering anti-retroviral treatment in countries most affected; providing support to children made vulnerable by AIDS; and investing in empowering women and girls to protect themselves from infection.

Ireland's record on the Millennium Development Goals is impressive. We have made very significant increases in overseas aid in recent years with the result that this year we are spending 0.54% of our GNP fighting poverty, disease and hunger.

This review of progress towards Universal Access to comprehensive HIV prevention, treatment, care and support is timely. Ireland encourages this meeting to make a strong contribution to the forthcoming G8 meeting and Millennium Development Goals Summit this year. On these occasions world leaders will not only account for their progress in meeting the international commitments already made but will also agree a collective response to the multiple needs, threats and challenges, including that of HIV and AIDS, faced by people everywhere.

The leadership of the United Nations is crucial to the global HIV challenge. As co-chair of the General Assembly discussions on UN System Wide Coherence, I see the fight against AIDS as a benchmark of UN reform in action. It is beginning to yield results in '*Delivering as One*'. The leadership provided by the UN Joint Programme on AIDS – UNAIDS – in coordinating and facilitating a Joint UN response to the global AIDS epidemic is to be commended. But much remains to be achieved.

We need better coordination especially at country level between the relevant UN agencies, the World Bank, the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria and other major bilateral funders. These major initiatives are bringing considerable additional and much needed financial resources to deal with HIV and AIDS and are achieving significant results. Further work is needed however, to align these new resources with other donor aid mechanisms consistent with agreed international commitments to improve aid effectiveness and promote local ownership.

The Secretary General's report points to the significant results being achieved towards Universal Access to comprehensive HIV prevention, treatment, care and support throughout the world.

The HIV epidemic is being contained in most regions of the world, except in Eastern Europe who are currently experiencing the greatest increase in new HIV infections.

There are enormous advances in HIV treatment which have increased life expectancy and the quality of life for HIV infected people with access to these medications. New challenges continue to emerge however, with increases in the numbers of HIV/TB co-infections and the need for further investment in second line anti-retrovirals. Ireland supports the call for stronger collaborative activities to address the increasing levels of HIV-TB co-infection. We all need to work together in support of national governments and health ministries to face these challenges and strengthen health systems to provide universal access to all essential health services.

The evidence shows that we need to do more on HIV prevention. As highlighted in the Secretary General's report, and to ensure a long term sustainable response to the global HIV pandemic, it is critical that further investment is made in evidence-informed HIV prevention programmes, in particular those targeted at high risk populations.

Prevention is at the core of our HIV strategy. In recognition of the need to increase investment in HIV prevention Ireland has developed a five-year national HIV prevention action plan. Starting this year the action plan prioritises the need for strong leadership, increasing knowledge and awareness of HIV transmission and providing key prevention services to those most at risk.

It is unlikely that HIV will ever cease to be a major cause of inequality, vulnerability and ill health until appropriate technological solutions are found that can effectively prevent HIV transmission. We should continue to invest in good quality science to find effective HIV preventive vaccines and microbicides directed at controlling the pandemic.

Female controlled HIV prevention commodities will be central to addressing women and young girls' disproportionate vulnerability to HIV. Although the data demonstrates that more women than men are accessing HIV treatment, it is also clear that more women are infected by HIV, in particular, in sub-Saharan Africa, and that women and young girls are more vulnerable than men and boys to HIV infection.

A combination of HIV and gender inequality is proving lethal for women and girls. Ireland is committed to addressing the particular vulnerabilities of women and young girls especially in poor countries. Addressing gender based violence as a core HIV prevention strategy is one of our key priorities.

There is a direct link between the well-being of women and children. When women are healthy, educated and free to avail of life's opportunities, children also thrive. The increasing number of women testing HIV positive and the consequent rise in peri-natal HIV transmission underscores the importance that Ireland places on gender equality. Prevention of mother-to-child transmission is a policy priority for Ireland. The rate of mother-to-child transmission in Ireland is less than 2%, while in sub-Saharan Africa about one in three children born to a HIV-infected mother will test positive.

The Secretary General's report highlights the *special plight of children* infected and affected by HIV. HIV positive children are significantly less likely to receive anti-retrovirals than HIV positive adults; national strategies to address the needs of children remain largely unimplemented and only 15% of orphans are receiving some form of assistance.

This calls for urgent attention. The 4th Global Partners Forum on Children affected by HIV and AIDS will be held in Ireland in October of this year. It will bring together global leaders and decision makers and will focus attention on key priorities to address the needs of children living in a world with HIV. Priority issues will include the extension of social protection mechanisms to benefit children; removing the barriers to essential services; keeping mothers alive; families together and supporting community based responses to meeting children's needs.

HIV and AIDS does not respect national boundaries or gender or age. In Ireland a National Campaign is addressing stigma and discrimination experienced by people living with HIV in Ireland. With the leadership and active engagement of people living with HIV in its design and implementation the first phase of this National Campaign has been hugely successful in increasing an understanding of HIV while highlighting the irrationality of stigma and discrimination at home and abroad. Research demonstrates key areas requiring further investment. The Government will continue to support this crucial campaign.

Civil society, including faith based organisations, are critical partners in Ireland's response to HIV and AIDS. Their work must be commended. They are central to service delivery particularly to marginalised and minority groups. They are strong advocates for HIV treatment access and they continue to challenge governments to meet their international commitments.

Ireland has a strong focus on addressing world hunger and food insecurity. We are particularly concerned about the impact of the current increases in global food prices for AIDS affected communities.

Addressing food security and nutrition in all settings is vital to achieving the goal of Universal Access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. Ireland is committed to supporting multi-sectoral HIV programming that incorporates effective food and nutrition interventions as a way of reducing vulnerability to HIV infection and increasing resilience to AIDS.

Mr President, we have the capacity, the medicines, the know-how and the institutions to address the challenge that this pandemic poses to achieving Universal Access and the Millennium Development Goals.

We now need the political will and the resources to sustain and increase the response to the challenges of the global HIV pandemic. This is increasingly important in light of current competing global issues.

Ireland will continue to play its part.

Thank you.