

Statement by Ms. **Berglind Asgeirsdottir**, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Health in Iceland

Implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the Political Declaration on
HIV/AIDS

United Nations General Assembly, 16 June 2009

Mr. President,

At the outset, I would like to welcome the report of the Secretary General on the progress achieved in the implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS. It provides a valuable update on developments in responding to AIDS.

During the High-level General Assembly Meeting on HIV/AIDS, in June 2008, a large number of countries reported that considerable progress had been made on halting the spread of HIV/AIDS, including in the areas of access to antiretroviral therapy and the prevention of mother-to-child transmission.

Unfortunately, these positive trends are not uniform and serious challenges still remain. Regrettably, the pace of new HIV infections continues to outstrip the expansion of treatment programmes, and commitment to HIV prevention remains inadequate. Without a doubt the global financial and economic crises has made things worse.

Active promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as protection of the girl child are critical to our efforts in combatting HIV/AIDS. Women and adolescent girls are the most exposed to the pandemic and often go without access to preventive care and health services. We continue to be deeply concerned about the overall expansion of the epidemic among women, children and vulnerable groups. Ensuring the protection of these groups must be key in all actions undertaken to combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Iceland firmly believes an effective response to HIV is one of the soundest forms of global investment in healthcare and development. It is critical that the commitment to fight HIV/AIDS is maintained and strengthened in the midst of ongoing economic challenges. Iceland will continue do its utmost to support international efforts to fight the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Respect for human rights is at the core of our work towards universal access to HIV Prevention, treatment, care and support.

It is of concern that some countries have laws and regulations that hinder effective HIV prevention, treatment, care and support for vulnerable subpopulations. Several countries also have laws that restrict the entry, stay and residence of people living with HIV based on HIV-positive status only. Any measures that are likely make people less inclined to undergo HIV testing, undermines efforts to achieve universal access to healthcare.

Mr. President,

Less than two years remain before the agreed deadline for universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care, and support. Only with concerted effort of all nations can we reach the targets set out in the Declaration of commitment on HIV/AIDS.

Thank you.