

“Vilnius Declaration”
on
Measures to Strengthen Responses to HIV/AIDS in the European Union
and in Neighbouring Countries

Against the background of the new threat posed by the rising HIV/AIDS epidemic in the European Union and in neighbouring countries, and based on the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS adopted by the UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS on 27 June 2001 and on other relevant international agreements¹, we, the Ministers and representatives of Governments from the European Union and neighbouring countries responsible for health, together with the relevant international partners and in the presence of a Member of the European Commission, meeting in Vilnius, Lithuania on 17 September 2004 for the Conference “*Europe and HIV/AIDS - New Challenges, New Opportunities*”,

- Reaffirming the Dublin Declaration on Partnership to fight HIV/AIDS in Europe and Central Asia, adopted at the Conference “*Breaking the Barriers – Partnership to fight HIV/AIDS in Europe and Central Asia*” (Dublin, Ireland, 23-24 February 2004), and mindful in particular of the requests made in that Declaration to strengthen the capacity of the European Union to fight effectively the spread of HIV/AIDS,
- Recognising that in our region persons at the highest risk of and most vulnerable to HIV/AIDS infection include children and young people, drug injectors and their sexual partners, men who have sex with men, sex workers, trafficked women, prisoners and ethnic minorities and migrant populations which have close links to high prevalence countries;

Declare our willingness to

- Ensure that coherent, comprehensive and multisectoral national HIV/AIDS coordination structures², strategies and financing plans are in place and are implemented at national and relevant sub-national levels, and foster the involvement of people living with or affected by HIV/AIDS, including persons caring for family members living with HIV/AIDS, in the further development of such measures;
- Conduct, with the participation of civil society, and particularly of people living with HIV/AIDS and of persons at the highest risk of and most vulnerable to HIV/AIDS infection, reviews of the progress achieved in implementing evidence-based national HIV/AIDS strategies or programmes. Such reviews should be available by the end of 2005 at the latest, and should be conducted every second year after the completion of the first review;
- Promote the fight against the pandemic, in line with the actions set out in the Dublin Declaration, and recognise the fundamental factors of equality between women and men, girls and boys and respecting the right to reproductive and sexual health, and

¹ The Millennium Declaration adopted by the UN General Assembly at its 55th session in September 2000, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo 1994 and UNGA July 1999), the Beijing Platform for Action (Beijing 1995 and UNGA June 2000)

² Based on the agreed principles of the “Three Ones”: one agreed AIDS action framework that provides the basis for coordinating the work of all partners; one national AIDS coordinating body with a broad-based multi-sectoral mandate; and one agreed country-level monitoring and evaluation system.

access to sexuality education, information and health services as well as openness about sexuality;

- Address, in line with the actions set out in the Dublin Declaration, the role of men and boys in combating HIV/AIDS and in the promotion of gender equality to benefit everyone and society as a whole, and encourage men and boys as partners to take responsibility for their sexual behaviour and to respect the rights of women and girls;
- Address the particular vulnerability of women and girls to HIV infection, in line with the actions set out in the Dublin Declaration;
- Progressively work towards the collection of biological and behavioural data, and its processing at European level, and ensure that comprehensive, standardized, comparable, ethical and adequately confidential national HIV/AIDS surveillance, monitoring and evaluation systems are in place, in order to improve the monitoring of the epidemic, of risks and of vulnerability to HIV/AIDS, to obtain insight into the trends of the epidemic and its underlying risk factors, and in order to collect reliable evidence to guide national and international HIV/AIDS policies;
- Provide universal, affordable, non-judgmental and non-discriminating access to prevention services for HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections, including i. a. preventive information and activities, voluntary and confidential counselling and testing, condoms, drug dependence treatment and harm reduction services for drug injectors³ and prevention of mother-to-child transmission;
- Provide universal, affordable, non-judgmental and non-discriminating access to effective, appropriate and safe care, support and treatment, including anti-retroviral treatment and harm reduction measures, also through the technical support of the UN through the global initiative led by the World Health Organisation and UNAIDS to ensure 3 million people globally are on anti-retroviral treatment by 2005 (“3 by 5”);
- Address the specific needs and requirements of migrant populations in terms of non-discriminating access to information and prevention, treatment, care and support, as borders in Europe are opened and as migration is likely to rise across the Continent as a result of free movement;
- Reinforce efforts to develop new preventive technologies as agreed at the Dublin Conference on New Preventive Technologies – Providing new options to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS (Dublin, 24 June 2004);
- Reinforce population-wide and targeted education efforts aimed at HIV prevention;
- Continue to develop and implement relevant legislation, in particular with a view to
 - prohibiting discrimination, inter alia in employment on the grounds of HIV status, sex, religion and belief, disability, age, and sexual orientation;
 - combating social exclusion and discrimination of people living with HIV/AIDS and of those at risk, and promoting social and labour market integration;
 - ensuring that the collection and maintenance of personal data related to HIV/AIDS comply with internationally accepted norms to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms and ensure confidentiality and respect for privacy;

³ in accordance with agreed definitions in the Dublin Declaration (para.10)

- guaranteeing freedom of movement and protection from coercive public health measures for people living with HIV/AIDS;
- Use national financial instruments as well as Community funds, including Structural Funds for the implementation of our policies to tackle HIV/AIDS.

Call upon the civil society and non-governmental organizations to

- further develop the awareness and the capacity to address HIV/AIDS related issues throughout the European Union and in its neighbouring countries;
- join partnerships with Governments, the European Community and International Organisations in order to ensure a comprehensive approach in the fight against HIV/AIDS;
- contribute to a coordinated effort of all stakeholders and players in the fight against HIV/AIDS, in order to minimise duplication and maximise synergies;
- advocate on behalf of key populations and those particularly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS so that their needs are fully respected.

Call upon international partners, particularly UNAIDS, its Secretariat and its co-sponsoring agencies, in partnership with the European Union and its Institutions and Member States, to

- ensure coordination and cooperation of the response to HIV/AIDS in the European Union and in its neighbouring countries, in order to minimise duplication of efforts and maximise synergies;
- support and facilitate the mobilization, transfer and effective use of financial and technical resources to scale up access to sustained prevention, care and treatment, including effective and safe low cost antiretroviral treatment (such as generic drugs) and harm reduction interventions in countries in need;
- promote and support cross border, sub-regional and regional technical collaboration and sharing of best practices in HIV prevention among vulnerable groups;
- guide and support reviews at national and regional levels of existing legislation, policies and practices with the objective of promoting the effective enjoyment of all human and civil rights for people living with HIV/AIDS and members of affected communities;
- support the meaningful involvement of people living with HIV/AIDS and their advocates in policy making and programme design, implementation and monitoring, and promote stronger regional cooperation and networking among people living with HIV/AIDS and civil society organizations;
- establish adequate fora and mechanisms, including the civil society and people living with HIV/AIDS, to assess progress in the implementation of the Declaration of Commitment of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS at regional level every second year, beginning 2006.

Welcome the presentation of the European Commission's recent document on a "*Coordinated and integrated approach to combat HIV/AIDS within the European Union and in its Neighbourhood*", and note the emphasis on

- working in partnership with international partners and relevant stakeholders;
- facilitating and speeding up the regulatory process for the authorisation of and access to innovative medicines against life-threatening diseases, such as new anti-retroviral treatments, and exploring the options available to support access to affordable anti-retroviral treatment including generic drugs;
- investing in the research and development of effective preventive technologies, such as vaccines and microbicides as stated at the Dublin Conference on New Preventive Technologies – Providing new options to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS (Dublin, 24 June 2004), and on including these in the EU Research Programs;
- reviewing the existing HIV/AIDS surveillance mechanisms with a view to achieving even more comprehensive surveillance, including data on behavioural and social issues, and ensuring that the activities of the future European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control will reinforce and coordinate existing efforts on the surveillance of communicable diseases, including HIV/AIDS;
- promoting the participation of the new Member States and of neighbouring countries in research and other networking activities including in relation to the development of public health measures;
- facilitating cooperation and networking on HIV/AIDS among interested parties in neighbouring countries, in order to make better use of existing financial instruments, and help these partners benefit from financial support through the Global Fund;
- exploiting the possibilities of supporting the development of relevant health care infrastructures through the Regional Funds, the World Bank and other donors as appropriate.

Follow-up

We reaffirm our strong support for close monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the actions outlined in this Declaration, along with those of the Declaration of Commitment of the United Nations General Assembly Session on HIV/AIDS, and those of the Dublin Declaration on Partnership to fight HIV/AIDS in Europe and Central Asia, and call upon the European Union and other relevant regional institutions and organizations to establish adequate fora and mechanisms including the involvement of civil society and people living with HIV/AIDS to assess progress at regional level every second year, beginning in 2006.