STATEMENT ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD AIDS DAY

1 December 2014

Tehran, Iran

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Hello and good morning ladies and gentlemen.

I am very happy to be here on this special day. I also thank all of you for being present here to listen to Mr Ban Ki-moon’s statement. With your permission, my speech will be in English. Thank you.

Dr. Sayari, Dr. Hashemi, Dr. Gouya, brothers and sisters living positively with HIV in this room, colleagues who are working to address and resolve the problem of HIV, my colleagues from the United Nations, colleagues of the media.

It is my distinct duty and pleasure to do two things this morning. The first is to share with you the reflections of our SG Mr Ban Ki-moon and secondly, I would like to share a few thoughts of my own on this important and special day.

For the first task we have translated Mr Ban Ki-Moon’s statement and will be shown on the screen and for the second part I will be relying on my colleague Mitra Behnam to do the interpretations.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen if you would permit I would like to add a few remarks of my own to those that were just shared with you from Mr Ban Ki-Moon, our Secretary-General, in New York.

I have worked in the United Nations for almost 30 years. I have also witnessed the response of the world and the UN to HIV.

In the early days, in the 1980s, many of us were terrified about the prospect of the transmittal of HIV through various means and vectors. But as time has passed, the triumph of science and of reason and of community spirit and response and enlightened government efforts have all played a role in reversing this epidemic.

We have reversed and we have bent back the disease. It is now time, as Mr Ban Ki-Moon says, “to break this disease and to end it by the year 2030”.

As Mr Ban Ki-Moon said the international community last week agreed to a Fast Track approach to achieve this goal of ending aids by 2030. And the strategy that they adopted focuses on the next five years between 2015 and 2020. The focus is on “Closing the Gap” and this gap needs to be closed in the next five years by focusing on three goals. All the actions relate to prevention and to treatment.
The first of the three goals under the strategy is to increase our treatment rate so that 90% of people living with HIV can benefit from sustained treatment. But in order to be effective, the treated people would have to reach viral suppression also in 90% of cases.

But as Dr. Sayari just mentioned, many people who are living with HIV do not even know that they have the virus. Therefore we need to also reach 90% of those people and diagnose them so that they can seek treatment.

Now in terms of the overall picture, as we know, the situation in Iran is one where we are dealing with a concentrated epidemic among certain key at risk populations.

And I would like to use this opportunity to again recognize the very proactive scientific and rational way which Iran is addressing the issues of harm reduction especially among injecting drug users. This is an approach – and I say this having worked in many countries that do not embrace harm reduction – this is an approach that is to be congratulated especially in terms of outreach services with oral substitution therapy and needle syringe programmes.

And my point is essentially very simple, as Iran moves forward to embrace the response to this disease, as it is led by people like Dr. Sayari and a number of individuals who will come to speak after me, I would like you to know that the United Nations is here to support what you are doing.

A number of UN agencies like UNODC, UNICEF, WHO, UNFPA, UNDP – all coordinated by UNAIDS led by Dr. Fardad Doroodi who is sitting in the front here – we are all joining forces to support the effort in Iran. And this involves a number of areas of work.

It involves education, awareness and training to students, to prisoners, to injecting drug users, to women who are undertaking risky behaviour and people who need this awareness. It involves extending facilities for preventive services to women to prevent mother to child transmission in 11 regional centres for example. It involves the UN providing anti retro viral (ARV) treatment to over 1000 of the 5000 people in Iran who are receiving this treatment. It involves supporting the provision of voluntary counselling and testing services in almost 50 prisons across Iran. It involves providing CD4 count machines. It involves developing “Positive Clubs” across the country.
And the work of all of these agencies is supported by the Global Fund to counter AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria (the “Global Fund”).

So in the final analysis, my request to all of you who are working on this issue on the ground level, through the universities and academic entities and through policy and decision-making is to not give up the fight.

*Accelerate* your efforts. The issue of HIV has come to define our times. And we will – ourselves – be defined by how we respond to this challenge. We know what to do, let us do it right and let us do much more of it.

Thank you for your time.