

UNHLM on HIV/AIDS 2016

Opinion Leaders' Dialogue on What it Will Take to End AIDS by 2030

Your excellences and distinguished members of the panel, esteemed guests, thank you for giving me an opportunity to speak.

My name is Hester Kuipers; I am the Executive Director for Europe at the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative. We are a non-profit organization dedicated to ensuring the development of a vaccine to prevent HIV infection and AIDS. Our vision is one that we share with all of you in this room, building and many others around the world; to achieve a world without AIDS

We need to implement a Fast Track approach and achieve an end to AIDS as a public health threat. But we cannot stop there, we must go beyond.

The Fast Track approach encompasses the 90-90-90 treatment strategy, as well as 90-90 prevention strategy: by 2020, 90% of young women and girls, and 90% of all key populations need to have access to combination prevention and sexual and reproductive health and rights services

It is exactly these populations that require our attention over the next 15 years. We are concerned that despite the successes achieved to date in the global response to HIV/AIDS, the pace of decline in the number of people newly infected has slowed in recent years, and in some regions the numbers of people acquiring HIV are rebounding. Last year, globally, 2.1 people were newly infected with HIV; a slight increase for the first time since 2000.

Two-thirds of new HIV infections occur in sub-Saharan Africa, and the majority were among women and girls; whereas key populations and their sexual partners accounted for more than 90% of new HIV infections in central Asia, Europe, North America, the Middle East and North Africa.

Prevention must be central if we are to end AIDS. There is an opportunity to substantially bring down the number of new HIV infections as today we have more options in the prevention toolbox than ever before; pre-exposure prophylaxis and ARV-based microbicides are the latest additions. Fast tracking roll-out and ensuring access to all proven prevention tools is an absolute priority – we must utilize current tools to avert every new infection and protect every life we can; and prevention only works if we put prevention tools in the hands of people who need them and want to use them.

But if we want to halt HIV and bring new infections towards zero we cannot stop there – the toolbox is not yet complete. We must continue to invest in the development of other prevention tools, notably a preventive vaccine. Because even with a massive scale-up of treatment and prevention tools, millions of people will still contract HIV and die from AIDS in the decades to come. We would not fulfill our promising to leave no one behind.

Vaccines are among the most powerful and cost-effective public health interventions. And an HIV vaccine has the potential to reduce new annual infections in low- and middle-income countries by almost half in its first 10 years alone, saving millions of lives. Achieving a vaccine will require advocacy, political leadership, partnerships across sectors and geographies, financing, and the dedication and support of researchers, healthcare workers, policy makers and communities alike.

In that regard, I would like to commend the leadership that African countries are playing in combatting HIV/AIDS and the role Africa is playing in developing a vaccine – progress we are achieving is in a large part thanks to the unwavering efforts of our many partners in Africa - researchers, governments, civil society and communities alike.

In conclusion, if we are to achieve and sustain an end of AIDS we need to support a comprehensive response; one aimed at maximum use of the prevention and treatment strategies available right now, including by addressing stigma and discrimination and the needs and wishes of all people, and women, young people and key populations especially. And one aimed at continued commitment to and investment in innovation, including accelerating research & development for new prevention options like vaccines, better treatment therapies, and a cure. We are pleased that the declaration that was adopted this week includes a commitment to making such investments. Thank you.