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**International Women's Summit:  
Women's Leadership on HIV and AIDS  
Opening Ceremony  
World YWCA Council  
July 5, 2007**

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[START RECORDING]

**MALE SPEAKER:** His Excellency, Honorable Mwai Kibaki,  
President of the Republic of Kenya.

[Applause]

Let's warm those hands, let's get them warm. [Spanish  
dialogue] Let's give him a big hand.

[Applause]

Let us have a word of prayer led by the RT. Reverend  
Lawrence Dena, the provincial secretary of the Anglican Church of  
Kenya.

**REVEREND LAWRENCE DENA:** Let us pray. The Earth is the  
Lord's and everything in it the world and all who live in it,  
for He founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the  
waters, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the  
Holy Spirit, amen.

Heavenly Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we want  
to thank you this morning for this great gathering. This whole  
gathering acknowledges you, the king of kings, and the Lord of  
Lords. Receive our praises. We worship you, oh, heavenly  
Father, this morning, we give you all the glory.

We want to thank you dear Lord because you created us  
male and female, for a good purpose. We thank you, dear Lord,  
because you intended us to have life in all its fullness, but

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because of sin, we have destroyed all that you intended for us. We come to you, our God, this morning in humility.

We pray that you may forgive us all our sins. And Father, we want to thank you this morning, for the work of the YWCA worldwide, the work of changing lives, the work of transforming lives. We want to thank you, dear Lord, even for the many efforts that even our governments have put in support of this work of YWCA.

And this morning as we gather here together, oh, God, we pray that you may guide us in all the deliberations, Father, that you may lead this conference and that the objectives of this conference will be achieved in a greater way. Father, we want to thank you because of that sin that has destroyed our lives, Lord we pray that you'll help us to eradicate HIV and AIDS and all other social ills that affect us.

We want to thank you, dear Lord, because you have been with us right from the beginning. And this is why you sent your son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for our sins, that we may have this life and have it in abundance. And so, Lord, we surrender ourselves before you.

As we continue with this conference, while I pray for security, appoint your people. Your people have come from all over the world just to glorify your name and to pray unto your name, oh, God, that you may hear our prayers and answer us.

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Oh, God, that we may realize these life goals that we have set for ourselves.

That we may enjoy this life that you have given us on this earth, that we may glorify your name, and so Lord, come and bless our meeting. Come and be with us, oh God, that we may experience your glory in everything, so we pray, believing and trusting in the mighty name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, amen.

**MALE SPEAKER:** Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, please be seated. Your Excellency, Honorable Mwai Kibaki, President and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Kenya, Your Excellency, Dr. Asha Rose Migiro, Deputy General Secretary of the United Nations, Kenya's Minister for Youth Affairs, Honorable Dr. Mohamed Kuti, Assistant Minister Gender and Social Services, Honorable Alicen Chelaite, the Honorable World YWCA President, the ICW President, the Secretary General, and the host Kenya YWCA distinguished delegates.

It is now my distinct honor and privilege to invite the secretary general of the YWCA Kenya, and vice president of the World YWCA, Mrs. Mwajuma Alice Abok, to make some welcome remarks and also run this morning's proceedings.

**MWAJUMA ALICE ABOK:** Your Excellency, Honorable Mwai Kibaki, President of Kenya, Excellencies, dignitaries from the U.N., Ministers for Youth Affairs, Ministers Gender, Sports, Social

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Services, President YWCA, General Secretary World YWCA, all protocol observed.

Your Excellency, Honorable Mwai Kibaki, President of the Republic of Kenya, Excellencies, guests, ladies and gentlemen. The Kenya YWCA is pleased to host the International Women's Summit, which takes place in conjunction to the 25th World Counsel of the World YWCA.

I would like to acknowledge your Excellency, the support given to us by the government of Kenya, specifically, the Ministry of Youth and the Ministry for Gender, Sports, Culture and Social Services, who have been our host ministries.

[Applause]

**MWAJUMA ALICE ABOK:** We would also like to put on record, the support from the office of the President, the Minister of Health, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Home Affairs. We do appreciate your accompaniment and your support in kind and in cash.

[Applause]

Your Excellency, this is the second time that the World YWCA is holding the World Counsel in Africa. The last time was 36 years, in 1971, in Accra, Ghana. I am proud to be part of the second World Counsel in Africa, and I am proud on behalf of YWCA of Kenya, and on behalf of the women of Africa who are members of the World Counsel.

[Applause]

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Your Excellency, having said that, this morning, there are very many things to be proud of. I am proud now to introduce Dr Musimbi Kanyoro, the general secretary of the World YWCA. Dr. Musimbi Kanyoro is the first woman from the developing world to be appointed general secretary of the World YWCA.

[Applause]

And that is in a period of 150 years. Dr. Kanyoro has been the General Secretary for the last 10 years and is recipient of the Kenya Government Presidential Award, the MBS, Moran of the Burning Spear – [Applause] – in recognition of her leadership. Dr. Kanyoro.

**MUSIMBI KANYORO:** Your Excellency, Honorable President Mwai Kibaki, Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. My task is to thank all of you for gracing this opening of this very important meeting that is led and convened by women of the world. I would like to acknowledge that this meeting has been convened by the World YWCA and the International Community of Women Living with HIV and AIDS and other numerous partners who are all present in this building.

We have had tremendous support from the U.N. agency, beginning with UNAIDS, UNFPA and the others. We've had tremendous support, as you've heard, from governments beginning with the Kenya government where we are hosted. We've had support from the businesses, that's why we are all here together. And I thank you all, your Excellencies, that you are here and your Excellence, I

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would like to acknowledge and let you know that, this room is full of dignitaries. If I began to name one by one we would stay for a very long time in this place.

But I do want to acknowledge, if you would permit me your Excellence, my board. The board of the World YWCA, that is lead by our president, Ms. Monica Zetzsche, who I felt is a very well distinguished and achieved engineer. It is the board that has guided—

[Applause]

**MUSIMBI KANYORO:** It is the board that has guided the preparations of this work and to them I would like to be able to give back the thanks for enabling us to be able to convene such an important meeting. Your Excellencies, we have come to Nairobi because we want to make a difference in our lives and the lives of communities in which we live. The purpose of the International Women's Summit is to empower, celebrate and contribute to building new visions for women's leadership in the context of HIV and AIDS.

By taking leadership into our own hands, and uniting in strength, we can lead change that we wish to see within ourselves and in our world. We do so, your Excellencies, because we care, first about what happens to us as women. We care about what happens to our families. We care about what happens to our world. The summit began yesterday with a one-day forum focusing exclusively, women who are living positively with HIV.

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By organizing the forum, we wanted to affirm and register that the leadership of positive women is not negotiable.

[Applause]

In the YWCA movement, we know that one woman can bring change to her family, and many women together will bring change to humanity. We seek to bring change to humanity. We believe in the power of girls and young women. We believe in the powers of mothers and grandmothers. We believe that every woman has an ability to make change. But we want this peace, your Excellence, we look for this peace. And I hope that in this summit, we will share what we are doing, but most important, we'll be asking for space at the table in the leadership. We'll be asking for the protection of the human rights of women and we'll be asking for resources to make what women care for come true.

[Applause]

And now, your Excellence, we have the joy and pleasure to present to you our World President, Ms. Monica Zetzsche, to make some remarks, thank you.

**MONICA ZETZSCHE:** I was just asking the audience to kindly use your headsets as I will turn into my mother tongue, Spanish, so thank you very much. [Spanish dialogue]

[Applause]

[Spanish dialogue]

[Applause]

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**MARIE-JOE VASQUEZ:** [Spanish dialogue]. Welcome to everybody. [Inaudible] I'm going to speak in Spanish, I'm sorry. [Spanish dialogue]

**MRS. MWAJUMA ALICE ABOK:** The first presentation will be Let There be Peace, and then [inaudible].

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** Dear fellow women, we are gathered here today to express the strength of a woman as a leader with our motherly and tender hearts. Let us not be the future witnesses of the destruction of HIV and AIDS. Let us all, unite dear women, and let us forge [misspelled?] on a common front.

Where did the old adage go to that said, you educate a woman, you have educated a whole nation. We [inaudible]. You destroy a woman, you have destroyed and ruined an entire nation.

[Applause]

**FEMALE VOICES:** [Singing]

**FEMALE VOICES:** [Singing]

**MWAJUMA ALICE ABOK:** Thank you, thank you very much. Your Excellency, after that wonderful entertainment, we are pleased and honored to have with us, dignified women and men who sit in some of the highest levels of decision making in their capacity as heads of U.N. agencies, government and NGO. They will identify some of the most crucial issues that impact responses to HIV, and how this in turn, impact women. Some of the questions will be: Which are the areas of greatest need? What is the role of communities and community

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organizations? And what kind of partnership between government, NGO and the U.N. would lead to better and more effective responses that work for women? With this, your Excellency, I would now like to call on our distinguished guest, Dr. Asha Rose Migirio, to address the summit.

[Applause]

**DR. ASHA ROSE MIGIRIO:** Thank you. [Foreign phrase]. Your Excellency, Honorable Mwai Kibaki, President of the Republic of Kenya, Honorable Ministers of the Republic of Kenya here present, Excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I wish to take this opportunity first and foremost to thank our hosts for a very warm welcome and hospitality accorded us since our arrival in this beautiful city of Nairobi.

Excellencies, I bring with me warm regards and best wishes from the Secretary General of the United Nations, his Excellency Ban Ki-moon. Personally, I'm honored and excited to be with all of you to discuss the literally vital theme of women's leadership in fighting AIDS. I pay special tribute to the World YWCA, the International Community of Women Living with HIV and AIDS, and other partners, who made this conference possible. You're all crucial allies of the United Nations.

From the birth of the United Nations, women have made judicious and skillful use of our organization as a platform to voice their needs, demands and priorities. From the signing of our

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charter, which proclaims the equal rights of women and men, and the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, through subsequent instruments that qualify human rights and fundamental freedoms, the United Nations has been a constant partner and ally of women around the world.

For more than 60 years, the Commission on the Status of Women has made remarkable contributions to improving the lives of women and girls around the globe. Since 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women has been primary global instrument in the work for true gender equality in the home, the community and society. And thanks to the Beijing Platform for Action, we have a clear road map for all actors, governments, civil society and the United Nations family, to end discrimination against women and girls, and to speed up progress towards gender equality. Gradually, but steadfastly, in the life of the United Nations, we have sought to integrate a gender perspective into virtually every aspect of our work, reflecting the growing understanding that we cannot solve any challenge that touches on the lives of people around the world without looking at how women are affected and how they can be part of the solution.

We are currently striving to strengthen our gender architecture and considering replacing our fragmented arrangements with one consolidated and well-resourced entity, with a strengthened mandate for system wide leadership.

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Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, The UN has also increasingly become a forum for action on the subject of this conference, the fight against the alarming spread of HIV among women and girls, and the burden which the impact of AIDS imposes on them.

A year ago, when governments met at the UN to adopt the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS, they pledged to promote gender equality and empowerment of women and girls as a way to fight the pandemic.

This year, the Commission on the Status of Women called for specific attention to prevention, treatment, care and support for girls, including addressing the needs of girls at risk, girls heading households and girls caring for the chronically ill.

It called on Governments to address the root causes of the feminization of women's and girls' increased vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

And it called on governments to educate men and boys to accept their role and responsibility. It encouraged the involvement of men and boys in adopting safe, non-coercive and responsible sexual and reproductive behavior.

This is why United Nations teams are working with Governments to ensure national AIDS strategies work for women. But this is often far from straightforward.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, as the Commission clearly has understood well, the factors that drive the feminization

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of AIDS cannot be addressed piecemeal. But, to be honest, despite our best intentions, many of our activities remain rooted at project level. We have still to make the leap from project to program, to achieve truly systemic change. We know what that change should look like. Real, positive change that will give more power and confidence to women and girls, change that will transform relations between women and men at all levels of society.

Change brought about through the education of girls, through legal and social reforms, and through greater awareness and responsibility among men.

Change that will free boys and men from cultural stereotypes and expectations, such as the belief that manhood comes from showing who's boss or from frequenting sex workers.

Change that ensures women have job opportunities, rights to land ownership and inheritance, change that gives women full access to practical options which can protect them and their children from HIV, including antiretrovirals to prevent parent to child transmission, and microbicides, as they become available, change that will allow women to take their seat at the decision-making table and play to the full their role in the fight against HIV/AIDS. This challenge will take all our courage and commitment. It will require sustained political leadership at the highest levels, combined with energetic and creative leadership in civil society and in the private sector. This conference, ladies and gentlemen, has been partly

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supported by the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS, an alliance of civil society groups, networks of women living with HIV, United Nations agencies, Government and business representatives, and celebrities that has come together to mobilize action on women and AIDS.

Alliances like this are critical to bringing about positive change. If we have learned one thing over the past 25 years, it is that only when we work together with unity of purpose can we defeat AIDS. But to have real impact, they must be guided by two key principles and these are accountability and a drive to achieve measurable results.

So, my challenge to each of us here today is to set clear aims and be prepared to be held accountable in our personal lives and in our professional responsibilities. For that is what true leaders do. As deputy secretary-general and as a woman from Tanzania, one of the most affected countries in this region, I will do everything in my power to ensure that the issue of women and AIDS is high on the international community's agenda.

[Applause]

And that is actually where it belongs. Keep the faith and keep up the fight. Thank you very much. *Muchas gracias. Asante sana* [misspelled?].

**MRS. MWAJUMA ALICE ABOK:** *Asante sana*, Dr. Migiro. Change that will facilitate changing lives and changing communities, I now

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invite Dr. Margaret Chan, director-general of the World Health Organization, to give her address.

Dr. Margaret Chan. [Applause]

**DR. MARGARET CHAN:** Good morning, [Foreign dialogue].

Your Excellency, President Kibaki, Honorable Ministers and Excellencies, Honorable Representatives of the YWCA, colleagues from the United Nations system, ladies and gentlemen, first and foremost, let me thank the World YWCA Council for organizing this very important event. And thank the government of Kenya for hosting it and for the gracious hospitality.

In December 2003 the World Health Organization three-by-five initiative was launched here in Kenya on World AIDS Day.

[Applause]

The initiative was the vision of my predecessor, Dr. J. W. Lee. At that time, more than four million Africans were in need of antiretroviral treatment and only one hundred thousand of these people were receiving treatment. The initiative did not have a perfect strategy. There was no guarantee of success. Not every problem of eligibility, logistics, implementation and funding had been solved. And the skeptics were certain that something so complex as antiretroviral therapy could not work in resourceful settings.

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Why not? Doctors could not prescribe, patients could not comply, governments could not pay. But an engine was set in motion, the spirit, the force that drove that engine was pure and simple. Something must be done.

[Applause]

The three-by-five initiative was also an appeal to fairness. Is it fair to deny in excess to life sustaining treatment for reasons of country of birth, income level or social status? That argument was compelling. Research offers simplified treatment regimens, commitment increase, so did funds, angels, activists and civil society rallied. Drug price dropped, people were brought back to life by these resurrection drugs. Last year, we saw a very important milestone. The number of people in sub-Saharan Africa receiving these drugs passed a one-million mark. It's 10 times increase.

[Applause]

This is proof of principle. It can be done. We have seen a second milestone, a commitment to universal access to prevention, treatment, care and support for all who need it, by the year 2010. We must all work together to make sure this promise is kept. And we have seen considerable progress. But we are still running behind this devastating and unforgiving epidemic. For every person starting treatment, another six people will become newly infected within a year.

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How can we catch up? We need to ask this question. How can we catch up? I believe there are three critical pathways to follow. First, we must steam ahead, full power, in the quest for universal access to treatment and care. It is the only fair and humane course to take.

Second, we must seize every opportunity for prevention. This is the only way to catch up. We need to catch up on the prevention of HIV infections in infants. The principle of fairness dictates that we do so. Half a million infants are born with HIV each year. And around 80 percent of them are born in sub-Saharan Africa. In affluent countries mother to child transmission of HIV have been virtually eliminated. But here in Kenya as in many other countries, less than one in ten of eligible women is benefiting from antiretroviral prophylactics to prevent transmission to their babies. Again, something must be done.

WHO has helped defined highly effective drug regimens for preventing HIV infection to infants. A strategy for scaling up coverage will be launched later this year. As we think about prevention, we must remember we have been struggling against this disease for a quarter of a century. We are in this for the long haul. We must never lose sight of the need for sustainability, comprehensive services and the strengthening of capacities in long-lasting ways.

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We know that containing HIV/AIDS is not about responding to a single disease. We have to deal with multiple opportunistic infections, sexually transmitted diseases, tuberculosis, malaria, reproductive health, mental health and psychosocial support. This is why WHO stresses the need to address this epidemic in ways that strengthen overall health system, health system capacity. And most especially the capacity of sexual and reproductive health services to reach those in need.

As we do so, we must not forget the mothers in mother to child transmission. For a mother to pass an infection to her child is a cause of unspeakable grief. It is also a signal of the failure of health services to care for her on multiple counts. We must do better.

[Applause]

We must also seize every opportunity for women to learn their infection status. Being married is not a safe haven.

[Applause]

When testing is done on a routine basis, with consent, counseling and confidentiality it becomes more normalized. Making any dimension of this epidemic more normal helps counter the three big enemies, stigma, fear and discrimination.

This brings me to my final and most important point. Women must be in the driver's seat. We know enough to reach

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this conclusion. Women can turn the tide in this epidemic. Women can best place to make existing tools work better. You in this room including so many HIV positive women are the living proof of this. Women are best placed to keep up with pressure for new tools. For example, microbicides hold great promise for giving women greater control.

Your Excellencies, poverty, gender inequality and intimate partner violence drive this epidemic. Women and girls in sub-Saharan Africa now bear the brunt. The HIV/AIDS epidemic has put the spotlight and I emphasize the epidemic has put the spotlight on deep rooted constraints that hold women back in many areas of life.

Traditional attitudes and behaviors change gradually sometimes over several generations. This epidemic gives us no such luxury of time. Through networks, support groups, partnerships and conferences like this one, and I have to thank YWCA for this, women are rising above the many social and cultural constraints on their power.

Community interventions have taught us that transformation at the grass roots level is possible. The chains, the chains of tradition that hold women back, can be broken. You have economic empowerment on this agenda. We are seeing more and more evidence that micro-financing schemes can release the power of impoverished women.

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When women control household income, they gain decision making power. When women makes decisions they invest in health promoting activities that benefit families and benefit the communities. Negotiating power goes up, also in intimate relations and domestic violence goes down. The progress you are making is very important. The progress you are making is progress for society at large. Women are the bedrock of family and communities, stability, security and well being.

If the empowerment of women, ladies and gentlemen, if the empowerment of women is one result of this epidemic, then all of society and all of public health will benefit. Thank you.

[Applause]

**MWAJUMA ALICE ABOK:** Thank you, thank you very much, Dr. Chan. Thank you, it can be done. Something must be done. We must do better and women must be in the driving seat. I would like to invite the executive director of UNAIDS, Dr. Peter Piot, to address the summit.

[Applause]

**DR. PETER PIOT:** Excellency, Honorable Mwai Kibaki, President of the Republic of Kenya, Excellencies, dear friends, good morning. Mr. President, it's always good to be back in Kenya, but now also to see that you have made real progress in

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the fight against AIDS. Thank you very much for your leadership.

[Applause]

Thank you, Ms. Indi [misspelled?] and Monica and the World YWCA for bringing us all together and for your stunning leadership. Thank you Marie-Jo and ICW for persevering where what has often been a very lonely battle.

This event marks a vibrant moment on women in AIDS. And such a momentum is desperately needed, because the most significant development of the AIDS epidemic is its growing feminization. What entered history 26 years ago as a disease of white gay men is now increasingly affecting women all over the world.

Take our host country. An astonishing 67-percent of all people living with HIV are women and girls. This trend of feminization is transforming the AIDS epidemic and now it must also transform equally our response to AIDS. As we heard from Dr. Margaret Chan, there is real progress in our response to AIDS all over the world. And we're starting to see a return on the investments of the past few years, finally I should say. But it's all going too slowly, far too slowly. If we continue at the current pace of access to treatment, there will be fewer than five million people on antiretroviral therapy by the year

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2010, just over half of the people who will need it. That's quite a long way from universal access.

And there's also encouraging news on the HIV prevention front. However, HIV incidence rates remain unacceptably high in many populations. With every day, 12,000 people becoming infected half of them women. And let me repeat what Dr. Chan said: For every person put on treatment in this world, there are six people who become infected with HIV.

This means that cues for access to antiretroviral therapy will just get longer and longer and longer if we continue at the current pace. Pointing also to an urgent need to reassess and revitalize HIV prevention.

So we need to do much better on both HIV treatment and HIV prevention. And to make the commitment by all union member states to universal access reality as the Deputy Secretary General just reminded us.

Now, what will this take? What will it take when it comes to women? Now let me highlight four challenges we all need to work on. The first as we heard by the previous speakers is stronger and sustained leadership. The Global Coalition on Women and AIDS has spelled out a clear agenda calling for three what I would call basics. The first one is securing women's rights. The second one is investing more in

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AIDS programs that work for women and thirdly is allocating more seats for women on decision making tables.

[Applause]

All this will require stronger leadership on women and AIDS at some many levels. I saw it clearly yesterday at the positive women's forum. And I see it growing from the many grass roots, women's organizations, networks of women living with HIV, AIDS activists, the African-Latin American First Ladies and I would like to salute here among us, the presence of the first lady of Honduras, business women's initiatives, such here in Kenya, just launched. Women Ministers of Health and of course, the YWCA and maybe also the YMCA.

In order to be effective as advocates, we not only need to challenge and denounce, but we also need to come up with practical solutions. This brings me to my second challenge. We need to do much better in terms of action that is relevant for women.

And the first question we need to ask in every AIDS activity is, of course, does it pass the test for women? Does it work for women? And let's not forget there is no such thing as a gender neutral program. And that our first duty is not to run. For example, we can no longer afford to promote condoms with messages that at the same time promote aggressive male sexual behavior. To introduce large HIV testing and male

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circumcision programs without incorporating implications for women. Or scale up HIV treatment programs without ensuring gender equality in access.

Does it pass the test for women, also means that female specific actions and methods such as a female condom must be fully resourced. And of course it includes boosting research from microbicides. And I repeat, it means that women must be at the table whenever AIDS programs are designed, implemented and evaluated, all three stages.

[Applause]

Certainly, what about us men? As far as I'm concerned, we have no choice, we men, but to embrace gender equality. Because I firmly believe that the cost to men of traditional masculinity is high, is far too high, compromising men's health and well being, as much as they compromise to a larger degree women's health, well being. And at the minimum, we should speak out loudly that we will accept nothing less than zero tolerance for gender-based violence.

[Applause]

And I should add that data actually showed that most men reject such violence. There's now also solid evidence base emerging on what works in terms of programs to influence male attitudes, behavior, beliefs as related to gender. The problem

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is that they're usually very small programs so there's now an urgent need for rapid expansion of these programs.

We men, we can be your partners, but certainly on this one women need to be in the lead. Otherwise it won't work because ultimately, it's about power.

[Applause]

My first point is that it's high time we take a long-term view on the AIDS epidemic. The sobering reality is that we will need to sustain an effective AIDS response over many decades, probably generations. We are not equipped for that yet, we haven't thought it through. This will require sustained and exceptional leadership, all of us and far beyond this room. The need for such a long term view is obvious when we consider the future of those of us who are antiretroviral therapy. How will we pay for this for decades? Will the second-, third-, fourth-line drugs be available to all who need it?

But it's the feminization of the epidemic and the reality that every day brings new infections that imposes that we think and act beyond our current crisis management which needs to continue because crisis is there. We will not be able to stop this epidemic if we are not addressing its drivers in the first place, gender inequality and its deadly consequences for women.

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This will require that we go well beyond the gender rhetoric. That we are far more operational in what we promote and that we build some very pragmatic alliances with national gender equality programs and women empowerment programs.

Dear friends, this brings me back to our conference and our agenda for this week. This conference is really emerging as a defining moment in the global fight against AIDS and certainly when it comes to women and AIDS. Our coming together of positive women, faith based women's organizations, women's and AIDS activist and the broader women's movements is creating a powerful synergy. Here we may finally have the unstoppable brilliant alliance that will successfully challenge both the AIDS epidemic and the inequality that continues to put women and girls at risk for HIV.

Women's groups are now increasingly committed to the fight against AIDS. But it's now also up the AIDS movement to demonstrate commitment to address gender inequality and support women's groups to address the feminization of the epidemic. It has to come from both sides. Because this is indeed a time in the history of AIDS to connect the dots between AIDS and gender equality, AIDS and human rights, AIDS and poverty alleviation.

Finally, few issues illustrate so dramatically the deadly consequences of gender inequality as AIDS does. Now, I'm an optimist and I'm firm believer that catastrophes also

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offer opportunities. So let's turn the paradigm upside down and make sure that the response to AIDS leverages a flicker glow to the disempowerment of women because it can't get worse. And if it works for gay rights, it must surely work for women's rights.

[Applause]

So on behalf of UNAIDS, the ten agencies that make up the joint UN program on HIV/AIDS I reiterate our commitment to support and fully support a Nairobi declaration coming out of this summit. [Applause] I wish you a productive and inspiring conference. [Foreign dialogue]

[Applause]

**MWAJUMA ALICE ABOK:** [Foreign dialogue] Thank you, Dr. Piot. It's now my pleasure to invite Ms. Helene Gayle, president and CEO of CARE USA, to come to the podium to address the summit.

[Applause]

**HELENE GAYLE:** Good morning. Your Excellency, President Kibaki, President of the Republic of Kenya, other excellencies and distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. It's a real honor for me to be here to address this assembly, this very important assembly and as my colleague, Peter Piot said in many ways this is a landmark event for all of us to be here to recognize and witness women coming together to speak to

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the issue of women's leadership in our response to HIV and AIDS.

I also want to recognize the leadership of the dynamic trio of Musimbi, Monica and Marie-Jo for pulling this together for the work of YWCA and ICW we are really pleased for your leadership in bringing us all together. Also want to acknowledge because I'm speaking on behalf of civil society organizations, the many other civil society organizations who are in this room and especially acknowledge the networks of women living with HIV/AIDS who are among us today.

So let me talk a little bit about the role of civil society and I do have slides with this presentation for those who find it easier to follow.

So, civil society is one of the most effective means of creating leadership, accountability, controlling potential abuses of state power and establishing the foundation of democracy, these things are key in our response to HIV/AIDS. And civil society can help shape the agenda of HIV and AIDS through empowering and galvanizing communities to take action by leading in advocacy, implementing policies and programs, helping to mobilize resources and holding governments and also donors accountable for our response to HIV and AIDS. Civil society can set the agenda, the international level and help to amplify the voices of affected communities, especially women

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and children whose needs and issues have to be effectively addressed in this epidemic.

Now CARE is an organization that – whose mission is to fight poverty around the world. We're a large international NGO working in 66 countries around the world. And this shows how we try to address poverty and to help communities achieve long-lasting reductions in poverty by developing human capabilities, economic opportunities, addressing social injustice, and social inequity. But with a focus on marginalized girls and women, because we believe that women are at the core of ending global poverty.

As an organization that focuses on poverty, our work on HIV and AIDS is key, because we know that HIV and AIDS is both a cause, as well as a consequence of extreme poverty. Around the world, as other speakers have said, women's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS is determined by unequal gender relationships, be they social, economic or power relationships, and that women are disproportionately affected by this epidemic because of their increased vulnerability, because they bear the psychosocial and physical burden of HIV care, and they also suffer discrimination and are often blamed for spreading this infection.

So our work, so our work, next slide, so our work as care focuses on addressing and identifying these underlying

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causes of social, cultural, and economic factors that serve as the drivers of the HIV and AIDS epidemic. And we also seek to address the social, economic, psychological toll that HIV and AIDS has on individuals, on families, and on communities, with a special focus on the increasing impact of HIV on women and children.

Next slide, because of the particular role that poverty plays in HIV and AIDS, we believe that economic strengthening has to be core in our response because poverty is the root of HIV transmission, as well as key to the outcome for individuals and families impacted by HIV and AIDS. Economic strengthening is a key tool to preventing HIV transmission and helping individuals and families cope with the impact of the disease with treatment access, improved nutrition, and stable livelihood. CARE's HIV programs world-wide use economic strengthening tools such as group savings and loans, and micro-credit programs to reduce poverty and therefore to reduce the vulnerability for HIV transmission.

As an example of this approach – this is a program that CARE runs throughout the world with group savings and loans, and these programs give quick access and savings services. And increase the economic and social security and reduce financial vulnerability for some of the most vulnerable groups, including widows, sex workers, people living with HIV/AIDS and orphans.

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These savings groups have become major sources of strength for women in helping them to reduce the stigma, improve self-esteem, improve social support and increase their ability to access key resources.

In CARE's village savings and loan programs worldwide, over 75-percent of the participants are women. In addition to our program efforts, we also feel that our role in advocacy and policy change is important. And while I won't go through all of the different actions listed here, I want to highlight a few, including the conference we had in Uganda about a year ago called Carpe Momentum, or Seize the Moment to put the agenda of women, HIV and human rights at the center of our response, and pull the intersection of the these key issues together.

Our work in Washington with key policymakers to look at the policies within our PEPFAR program and other policies that have an impact on the lives of women and children in HIV and AIDS to try to make sure that those policies are sensitive to the needs of women and children, and a conference that we have every year, an advocacy conference, where we bring volunteers from around the United States together to raise their voices and talk on behalf of women, children and global poverty.

In order to have a successful response to HIV and AIDS, we must also include civil society organizations and increase the representation of civil society organizations in policy

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making. We also have to increase partnerships and coordination between governments and civil society organizations and make sure that civil society organizations are represented in planning, implementation, and monitoring of the response.

Third, we have strengthened capacity of social networks of civil society organizations and increase donor interest in increasing that capacity. Fourth, it's important that we increase the voices of civil society organizations and advocacy and influencing policy change, and keeping the needs of the community at the heart of policies related to HIV and AIDS. And finally, we have to make sure that we increase resources towards meeting the needs of communities, especially women and girls.

In closing, I want to just show a video from a campaign that we have in the United States called the I Am Powerful campaign. It's a campaign that we've developed to mobilize women around the world to support and empower women, particularly poor women, and women living with HIV around the world. So this is our I Am Powerful campaign, and if you'll turn to the screen on the left, you'll see one shot, one example of our campaign and the message that we're trying to get across about empowering women around the world.

**VIDEO:** -that could improve conditions, helping poverty, yet it's been largely ignored. That resource is

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women. In many of the world's poorest communities, women are denied the significant role, so often their talent and potential remain untapped. I am powerful. I am powerful. I am powerful. I am powerful. I am powerful. I am powerful. I am powerful. I am powerful. I am powerful. I am powerful. I am powerful. I am powerful.

It's a source of power the world can no longer afford to overlook. She has the power to change her world; you have the power to help her to it. Call or visit CARE.org.

**MS. HELENE GAYLE:** Thank you.

**MWAJUMA ALICE ABOK:** Thank you, doctor. Again, we are indeed powerful, especially today in this room. We are powerful, we are ready to find solutions and [inaudible] to HIV and AIDS. Thank you.

I would like to invite Juwita Suwito and Kirsty Kelly to present the following. Juwita is the general secretary, YWCA Malaysia, and Kirsty is the president of YWCA, Great Britain.

[Song for HIV/AIDS victims] [Applause]

[Song for HIV/AIDS victims][Applause]

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** Thank you, Juwita and the team. I would like now to introduce and welcome the assistant minister for Gender, Sports, Culture and Social Services, Honorable Alicen Chelaite, to speak to us.

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**ALICEN CHELAITE:** Good morning, your Excellency and honored guests. I would like to present to you 14 women who have shown exceptional leadership in making a difference in HIV and AIDS.

Professor Sandra Thurman chairs a selection committee of 12 women representing all regions of the world. The most important criteria will have programs involve people living with HIV, sustainable impact, empowerment of the community, sustainability, gender inequality, innovation, and strategic partnership building. Sorry, I'm a little bit nervous, this is very intimidating. [Laughter]

We saw that women often with very little resources and often in the face of danger rise up and challenge cultural norms. These women recognize that challenges that go beyond the interests and the rewards for the betterment of community. Some of the women are women living with HIV, and as a woman who has been living with HIV myself for 13 years, I understand some of the challenges that they experience.

**PROFESSOR SANDRA THURMAN:** In accordance with the World YWCA, Women Leading Change Awards, a monetary award will be given to the community organization that the women are working for or the organization that nominated them for this prize. We want to thank the Kenya Country office of the U.S. president's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, for underwriting the awards and

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call on Mr. Buck Buckingham, the country coordinator of PEPFAR, to say a few words. Buck?

[Applause]

**BUCK BUCKINGHAM:** Your Excellency, Honorable Mwai Kibaki, President of the Republic of Kenya, Honorable Ministers and Excellencies, U.N. Dignitaries, leaders of the YWCA, globally and here in Kenya, honored guests and awardees, and most importantly women who are leading change everywhere, [Foreign dialogue].

On behalf of United States Global AIDS Coordinator Ambassador Mark Dybul and United States Ambassador to Kenya Michael Ranneberger, it is a very great honor to join you today.

As country coordinator for PEPFAR in Kenya, and as someone, who like many of you, is living with AIDS, I cannot tell you what a personal thrill it is to be able to fund these very important awards that are about to be received. As has been noted, this is, and we dare not forget the largest gathering of women in human history, focused on the pandemic of HIV and AIDS.

[Applause]

Because of the leadership of the YWCA, and particularly of her noble Kenyan General Secretary, history is here being rewritten and a new and promising future is being announced.

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[Applause]

We need a new history, because for too much of the history of this epidemic, three Vs have simplistically defined of women in too many minds. First, women have been seen as mere vessels, incubators of potentially infected infants. Second, women have been seen as vectors, points of transmission of the virus from one person to another. And most poignantly and tragically, women have been confined to the role of victims, condemned to infection without their knowledge or against their wills, by cultural norms, by horrific behavior by men, by poverty and injustice. And I know that you don't need me to tell you that men were the one that defined those three Vs, and confined women to them.

This meeting though and these awards are about a fourth V that I hope and trust you will celebrate with me. Starting here and starting now, the whole world must know and acknowledge that women can be, in the case of these awardees, already are. And if we are to ultimately turn the tide against HIV and AIDS, must forever be victors in the global effort to end AIDS.

[Applause]

I offer these brief remarks and dedicate my government's small part in these awards to the memory of my mother, Ruth, who raised me with a sure and confident faith,

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proven repeatedly by the example of her remarkable life, that there is nothing, absolutely nothing, that women who are united cannot achieve for good. Thank you. [Applause]

**ALICEN CHELAITE:** In the category of providing access to treatment, care and support, we call on Rosa Auma from Mathare Mother's Development Center. Rosa shows exceptional leadership in reaching out - [Applause] - in reaching out to vulnerable children in Mathare sounds in Kenya, and offers vital care and support without which these children would not be safe. We celebrate her for strengthening support groups for people living with HIV in communities throughout Kenya and for providing home-based care. Rose has the courage to speak out, promote positive living, and be a compassionate voice to others.

We call on Anita Isaacs from the YWCA of Namibia. Anita Isaacs has displayed exceptional leadership in initiating support groups and networks for people living with HIV. Anita advocates for increased access to treatment and services for women living with HIV, and has made important - [Applause] - lengths between HIV and AIDS and violence against women. We celebrate Anita for the pro-active role that she takes in promoting the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls.

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**PROFESSOR SANDRA THURMAN:** In the category of addressing gender and equality, we call on Madeline Lubuya Mbuji from the YWCA of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Madeline's leadership has instrumental in addressing the attitudes and behaviors that put young women at risk for HIV infection in Kinshasa, for establishing youth clubs that provide the space to explore HIV, and AIDS and other challenges and for training her peers to provide effective leadership effective leadership on HIV and AIDS.

Violeta Ross, from REDBOL in Bolivia, is unfortunately not able to be with us today, but we'll make sure that she gets her award. Violeta's leadership of women living with HIV and AIDS in Bolivia and Latin America has been exceptional. Violeta's described by her friends and colleagues as a fireball, she's raised the visibility of networks of women living with HIV traditionally led by men. Violeta was the first woman to chair a network of people living with HIV in Latin America and used the opportunity to open the doors for other women to follow in her footsteps. [Applause]

**ALICEN CHELAITE:** In the category of addressing stigma and discrimination, we call on Kousalya Periasamy from the Positive Women's Network for her leadership and inspiration in establishing the only registered network for women living with HIV in India.

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[Applause]

This network reaches over 5,000 women and works actively to provide an environment free of stigma and discrimination, while providing positive women with psycho-social support services, training, and a safe space to meet.

We call on Anne Ntombela, originally from Kenya, from Springs of Hope for restoring dignity to women living with HIV, challenging stigma and discrimination and ensuring people infected and affected have access to the necessary information and support through her organization. [Applause]

**PROFESSOR SANDRA THURMAN:** In the category of innovative leadership, we call Tashinga Matindike from the YWCA of Zimbabwe for creating a space - [Applause] - for creating a space for young people at the University of Cape Town to engage in a dialogue around HIV and AIDS through an innovative Web site called Enveloped Emotions.

Enveloped Emotions is an example of the different individuals can make when we take it upon ourselves to educate our peers about the attitudes and behaviors that place them at risk for HIV infection.

[Applause]

Alice Wellborn. Alice Wellborn is a visionary, courageous and passionate advocate whose leadership transformed the international community of women living with HIV, and whose

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efforts have transformed the global women and AIDS movements. Alice has always promoted shared power and collaboration. Her wisdom and generosity epitomize what leadership should be and has touched thousands of lives. Among many of her accomplishments, Alice is known for developing a holistic workshop called Stepping Stones, which explores the role of gender, sex and relationships in our lives, and has been adapted into many different cultural settings. [Applause]

**ALICEN CHELAITE:** In the category of policy and advocacy, we call on Irina Borushek from the All-Ukraine Network of People Living with HIV, on her leadership on advocacy around access to treatment, and effective involvement of people living with HIV in its decision making and accountability of funding. It was because of Irina's personal motivation and leadership that over 4,000 people had access to treatment in 2006.

Irina was critical introducing home-based care services, including adherence programs for intravenous drug users and pregnant women in all regions of the Ukraine.

[Applause]

Veronica Kini-Morfaw from Moontaka Village Women Common Initiative Group for her leadership in reducing the stigma associated with HIV and AIDS in Cameroon. Veronica Kini-Morfaw works with associations -[Applause] - developing culturally

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appropriate ways of communication. This group was the first to empower community, and has grown to a network of 20 groups of grassroots women by sensitizing and engaging traditional leaders in the AIDS response, for raising awareness of the social-cultural practices that contribute to the spread of HIV, in a problem where polygamy is widely practiced and from mobilizing people living with HIV to speak out on issues of concern.

[Applause]

**PROFESSOR SANDRA THURMAN:** In the category of promoting and implementing HIV and AIDS and prevention programs, we call on Dawn Averett Bridge from the U.S.A, for her leadership in working to change the course of the AIDS pandemic through the Well Project, providing comprehensive information on treatment and prevention for women through their multi-lingual Web portal that provides information on HIV and AIDS for women and their caregivers, that reaches people in 183 countries. Dawn has become one of the most prominent HIV and AIDS treatment advocates, as well as an accomplished speaker and published writer on women's issues.

[Applause]

Next we call on Neema Mgana from the African Regional Youth Initiative in Tanzania, for her leadership and vision in establishing the African Regional Youth Initiative, which

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serves over 400 youth and community based organizations. Neema has implemented cross-regional programs in 20 countries. She is recognized as a leader in international development and represents a new generation of women who seek to reach out beyond their own borders. Neema recently demonstrated her leadership by developing a model that highlights the participation of civil society in achieving poverty reduction.

[Applause]

**ALICEN CHELAITE:** And finally, we call on lifetime achievers. Professor Miriam Were, the Kenyan National AIDS Control Council, she's from the Kenya National AIDS Control Council. For her lifetime commitment to working with disadvantaged people, to improve the quality of their lives, and her innovative approaches to community-based empowerment, for her current leadership in driving the national HIV and AIDS response in Kenya. Professor Were's accomplishments are too many to mention here today. She has worked close to three decades to ensure that women and girls have a better tomorrow.

[Applause]

Dr. Sheila Tlou, health minister of Botswana, for her leadership of more than two and a half decades in health and gender equality. Professor Tlou founded the Society for Women and AIDS in Africa and because of her more than 6,000 women and men were reached through peer education. Upon becoming

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Minister of Health, she implemented prevention of mother-to-child transmission programs to every health facility in Botswana. Today, women in Botswana who give birth have 100 percent access to treatment, and mother-to-child transmission of HIV - [Applause]- I want to finish this because it's important. Mother-to-child transmission to HIV has been reduced from 40-percent in 2002 to 6-percent in 2006.

**MWAJUMA ALICE ABOK:** Thank you, Sophie [misspelled?], thank you, Sandra. I would now like to kindly request his Excellency, the President to come and kindly give their words to the awardees accompanied by the president of the World YWCA, Monica Zetzsche.

[Applause]

Could we have the awards please, the awards? Joyce could you facilitate the awards please?

[Handing out awards to awardees]

Thank you, your Excellency, thank you very much.

[Applause]

Thank you, your Excellency, and congratulations, ladies. I would like to invite Ms. Rose Auma of the Mathare Mother's Development Center to come up and share her story with us. Rose?

**ROSE AUMA:** Good morning, your Excellency and honored guests. First of all, my name's Rosa Omia, from Mathare

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Mother's Development Center. We [inaudible] involve groups [inaudible]. I stand before you as a strong women who is also a survivor.

Mathare was not my home, but it has become my haven and refuge. After my husband died of AIDS, I was thrown out of my home. I found my way to Mathare in Nairobi. I had just given birth to my second child, a baby girl and I was weak. Soon after we were diagnosed HIV positive, the [inaudible] even from Mathare Mother's Development Center and groups there gave me support.

A high level stigma [inaudible], I challenge to reach out of the infected women and AIDS. This closing my [inaudible] many women to join hands with me to form [inaudible] support group in Mathare. Together we formed a community-based organization all over Kenya. Most of these support groups have remained strong, sustained by their commitment and education.

I have supported children from the Mathare Mother's Development Center. We the few, children from [inaudible] would be locked up in their houses because their parents go to work. I have seen a reduction of children getting banned. Women do not [inaudible] with their children strapped behind their back. This has always motivated me to dedicate my effort, so that children grew up in a secure environment.

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Thanks to Mathare Mother's Development Center and groups Kenya for providing me with this opportunity. Providing care and support it requires sacrifices of time, energy and strapped resources. Many times I found abandoned babies. We embrace these children in our shanties we call our homes. We are poor, but our hearts are rich.

[Applause]

My [inaudible] gratitude go to World YWCA for recognizing our efforts. I am indebted to Mathare Mother's Development Center and groups Kenya. I share this award with the many women and girls. At the seven-years-old, I go on, support my two children and continue to support my community. I'm very proud to celebrate my nine-years-old living with HIV positive. Thank you.

[Applause]

**ALICEN CHELAITE:** I'd like to now call on Anita from the YWCA of Namibia to say a few words. [Applause]

**ANITA ISAACS:** Good morning, your Excellency, your Excellencies, honored guests. Allow me first to extend my proper gratitude to the World YWCA for allowing me this distinguished honor to address this important event in this era of HIV and AIDS.

My name is Anita Isaacs. I am far from the rural areas in the northern part of Namibia. I've been living with HIV and

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AIDS for 15 years now. I struggle with AIDS related illnesses for four years before and have been on ARV's for five years now. After facing stigma and discrimination and going through a violent relationship, I was left with no option but declare my HIV status public in order to liberate myself and other women in my community.

With the assistance from the regional governor, who provided me with an office, I formed a support group of people living with HIV and AIDS in my region. Those groups grow in numbers. At this moment, there are more than 51 support groups in four regions in Namibia. At first, we thought that we could fight stigma alone. But realized that stigma was not the only challenge facing us. We also needed financial support, food, shelter for some of our members, better treatment and care, and we needed to stop the worst of it all, which was violence in our homes, in our family. Alcohol, drugs in our cultural background was one of the contributing factors.

I realized that the way I was treated was a calling, to save and help others. I therefore decided to resign from my government job and join the dynamic team of the YWCA of Namibia, as a coordinator on the project on violence against women and children and at the same time, I continue to work with my support groups. Our projects aim was to create a training center on violence and HIV and AIDS, and to create

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awareness on violence and HIV. The Namibian government have put in place laws that protect women, such as the Combating Rape Act that was passed in 2000, and the combating Domestic Violence Act, which was passed in 2003.

But these laws are non-existent to us who are women. As a result, women suffer in silence. We at the YWCA sensitize women, men and children on these laws with the assistance from our partners. We have a [inaudible] system with our partners, and work closely with policy makers, who in return listen to us and respond to our calls when in need.

Our way has been easy with the assistance from our government. Working with government has brought mutual respect and understanding [inaudible] a severe society in government. It is therefore vital that government work with us, because we are the people on the ground, we feel the pain, and we are in the situation, before they implement laws that don't work for women and girls. It is only this partnership that true change can happen.

Last, but not least, I'm calling upon women of the world, especially African women, to stand up and fight against violence and the spread of HIV and AIDS. Let us not be bound by our cultures, which can be changed, but only we have the power to change our lives and our cultures. I thank you.

[Applause]

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**MWAJUMA ALICE ABOK:** Thank you, Anita, thank you, Sophie and Sandra, and congratulations to all the awardees. I would now want to invite the Nairobi Youth Choir.

[Youth Choir sings]

**MWAJUMA ALICE ABOK:** Thank you to Nairobi traveled over 800 kilometers with us this morning. Thank you. Thank you for your advice for us to take control. We have a poem, and a song.

[Youth Choir sings]

[Applause]

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** Thank you. Thank you, Nairobi Girls Chorale. Thank you very much. It is now my pleasure to invite the Minister of State for Youth Affairs Honorary Board, Dr. Mohamed Abdi Kuti to speak to us and to invite His Excellency, the President to give his keynote address. Dr. Kuti.

[Applause]

**DR. MOHAMED KUTI:** Your Excellency, the President of the Republic of Kenya, Honorable Mwai Kibaki, your Excellency, the First Lady of Honduras, Deputy Secretary General of the United Nation, Dr. Asha Rose Migiro, the President of YWCA, Mrs. Monica Zetzsche, the General Secretary of YWCA, Dr. Musimbi Kanyoro. Honorable ministers and assistant ministers, prominent secretaries present here today, dear delegates, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, it gives me a great

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pleasure to welcome you all this, to this auspicious gathering. And on behalf of Kenyan youth, both male and female, we wish all our visitors a great time while in our dear country Kenya.

It is indeed an honor for Kenya to host such a conference which has brought together over 1,500 delegates from all over the world. The theme of this conference, Your Excellency, Women's Leadership and HIV and AIDS, is very apt, particularly for us here in Kenya, where this cause has made, has been declared a national disaster.

I am glad to inform you that youth and health is one of the priority functions of my ministry and it is one we are pursuing with a lot of zeal. Your Excellency, ladies and gentlemen, HIV and AIDS have a deficiating social economic effect on boards, communities and countries, particularly in Sub-Sahara and Africa that have necessitated the infusion of massive resources to fight it. Regrettably, these are resources that will otherwise have been put into other product sectors in a continent wrecked by poverty.

But the most worrying fact is that HIV and AIDS is mostly afflicting young persons upon whom the future depends on whose energies, if they were healthy will be utilized in developing both individual families, communities and nations. In our own country, research has established that 70-percent of

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all new HIV and AIDS infection take place among persons aged between 15 and 19 years.

Women and girls are particularly vulnerable, mostly because of their physical makeup and other factors like poverty, illiteracy and marginalization. Your Excellency, ladies and gentlemen, the Kenya government has put in place several policy measures and programs to combat HIV and AIDS and which the Ministry of Youth is promoting.

And among these are one, increased information and education on HIV and AIDS. That will empower people to make the right decisions about their sexual and reproductive health. Boosting access to quality primary health care. Support for increased utilization of VCTs [misspelled?] and counseling of both the infected and afflicted persons. Increased assist to anti-retroviral drugs. Support for anti-stigmatization campaigns by all concerned. Manned main streaming of HIV and AIDS in government and private sectors.

It is our belief that with these interventions and in partnership with our international development partners like the World Health Organization, UNAIDS, UNFBA and other stake holders, we will be able to control to manageable levels, this disease that has adversely affected millions of all people.

In conclusion, Your Excellency, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to reaffirm our commitment to promoting and

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attaining of gender parity in the distribution of leadership positions in government job listings. In the political field, our 22 strong parliaments comprises only of 18 women in piece. This being an election year, I challenge our women folk to rise to the occasion and utilize their numerical strength to boost their presence in parliament and in local authorities.

[Applause]

Thank you. I especially encourage young women known to be left behind.

[Applause]

With these few remarks, it is now my pleasure and duty to invite Your Excellency to give the keynote address and to officially open this conference. Your Excellency.

[Applause]

**PRESIDENT MWAI KIBAKI:** Well, thank you. Yes, please be seated. Distinguished women leaders, ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of all Kenyans and on my own behalf, I warmly welcome you all to Kenya for the 25th and 26th World Young Women Christian Association and counsel conference. I take this early opportunity to wish you fruitful deliberations and a rewarding stay in our country. I note that this conference is being held in Kenya for the first time.

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I convey our appreciation to the Executive Committee of the World Young Women Christian Association for choosing Kenya as the venue of this conference.

[Applause]

Let me also take this opportunity to acknowledge the crucial role that the World Young Women Christian Association has continued to play in promoting the welfare of women and girls. Today, the association reaches more than 25 million women and girls in 125 countries providing them with the support they need to develop the full, their fullest potential. I express my gratitude to all members of your association for their contribution and I urge them all to rededicate themselves to the vision of a society where girls and women live fulfilling lives.

Indeed, as you deliberate on the agenda of this conference over the next couple of days, you should also celebrate the successes that have been realized so far. In recent times women issues have taken center stage globally. Many countries are today implementing the Beijing platform of action on the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, and the millennium development and goals, all of which have positive implications for girls and women.

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Indeed today, more than at any other time in the world's history, there are more women occupying key leadership positions. For example, Africa today boasts of its first woman president in Liberia.

[Applause]

In spite, in spite of the progress that has been recorded, 70-percent of people living on less than \$1 per day are women. The picture becomes more disturbing when we call to mind figures on HIV, AIDS and women. Recent data shows that women make up to 48-percent of all people living with HIV.

In sub-Saharan Africa, 60-percent of all adults living with the virus are female while among the youth, three out of four young people living with the virus are female. These facts testify to the challenging reality that must be addressed. They will also remind us that much more work needs to be done in empowering women and girls to protect themselves from HIV/AIDS.

I am therefore encouraged to note that the theme of this year's conference is "Changing Lives, Changing Communities: Women's Leadership on HIV and AIDS." By emphasizing the leadership of women and the role of communities in HIV prevention, care and treatment, this conference will go a long way in strengthening the war on HIV/AIDS. I am optimistic that the emphasis on women leadership will also

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serve as a wakeup call to all women and girls to take a responsibility not only for their safety but for the safety of others as well. This is because women are the foundation of the family and indeed of society.

Women are peacemakers. They know how to nurture and set and yet they are strong, resilient and industrious. To invest in women is to invest in the development of society.

[Applause]

Similarly, the emphasis on communities will contribute towards sensitizing all community members on their moral duty to reinforce the social fabric around those in need by fighting stigma, taking care of affected industrial and families.

Indeed, I wish to emphasize that the role of communities in fighting HIV/AIDS in all its dimensions can no longer be ignored. HIV/AIDS is not just a health issue that should be left to individuals or families. It is also a social issue that demands our collective responsibility as individuals, government, civil society and the corporate sector.

As we seek to mobilize communities and increase women leadership in fighting HIV/AIDS, let us always bear in mind that gender inequality and the low status of women in society are two of the principal drivers of HIV/AIDS. Therefore, in tackling the problem of HIV/AIDS, we must also address those

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specific challenges that relegate women to a subordinate status and impede their empowerment.

In this regard, I wish to call upon all country chapters of the Young Women's Christian Association to redouble their efforts in helping women and girls to overcome the challenges that condemn them to a vicious circle of poverty, dependence and exploitation. In particular, we have a duty to eliminate ignorance from our ranks since this is one of the key causes of women vulnerability. We must do all that is in our power to ensure that girls go to school while women acquire skills that will enable them to earn a livelihood and take control over their lives.

Young association, your association should also serve as a voice for the girl child by encouraging parents and communities to invest in girl's education. In Kenya, we are providing free primary education. The program includes an aggressive campaign to parents to send their girls to school which has helped us attain gender parity at this level. We are emphasizing education because it is only through the acquisition of knowledge that our children can be granted a decent future.

Besides education, you must actively fight negative social and cultural attitudes and practices that constrain the girl child and women from realizing their full potential. You

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should also be at the forefront in lobbying for legislation that will adequately prevent and respond to domestic violence and gender-based violence.

Equally important, you should be at the forefront in lobbying for more women positions in leadership. In Kenya, we have now made it mandatory that 30-percent of all new government employment opportunities are reserved for women.

[Applause]

We intend to raise this percentage to 50-percent in order to attain gender parity.

In addition, we have recently established a two billion shillings women enterprise development fund to enable women startup or scale up income generating enterprises.

[Applause]

I am happy to note that in Kenya, the Young Women's Christian Association has consistently addressed some of the challenges facing women. The association continues to be one of the government's social partners in improving the lives of women and girls. I am encouraged to note that the association now has a membership of 20,000 and has been able to make a positive difference in the lives of many girls and women.

In conclusion, I wish to invite our distinguished visitors to set aside time to tour various parts of our country and sample some of our very special tourist attractions. You

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are also welcome to visit our country aside, our country again in the future and to enjoy Kenya's unrivaled opportunities for adventure, holiday, wildlife, safaris and sightseeing as well as culture and sport tourism.

With these remarks, it is now my pleasure to declare this conference officially open and to once again to wish you all a fruitful deliberations. And in particular, I would like you to take a little time off this time because I see many of you have come from very far and it will be a long time before you come to our location again to come to these parts. So I hope that you will take this opportunity to visit more of Kenya, Uganda next door, Tanzania here and these are all here. This is your best time. And don't worry about two days off.

[Laughter]

After, I don't think anyone is going to worry you about taking three, four days. Take them off and see these countries since it will be a long time before you come again this way. So anyway when you are here we wish you well and we thank you very much and please, do see more of the country to meet the people.

We thank you and we will hope that anything we can do as a nation you will tell our people who are with you, tell them what you think we should do to help you and to encourage

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you to see more of the country around you. Thank you very much indeed and please enjoy yourself.

[Applause]

**MWAJUMA ALICE ABOK:** Thank you. Thank you, Your Excellency. As His Excellency prepares to take his leave we shall have the Onimote Boy Quartet [misspelled?] to entertain us again.

[END RECORDING]