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Check Against Delivery**

AIDS 2006 Opening Session Speech

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Distinguished guests, delegates, friends welcome to the XVI International AIDS Conference. My name is Helene Gayle. I am President of the International AIDS Society, and along with Mark Wainberg, I have served for the past two years as the Co-Chair of this conference.

As you know the theme of this year's conference is Time to Deliver. I know most of us would say that it has always been time to deliver --- and it has been --- and it will still be time to deliver when we meet again in two year. However, today, 25 years into this epidemic we have a real opportunity to deliver like never before. We have more resources than ever, more knowledge than ever, more political commitments than ever. Still, the epidemic continues to outpace us. We need to strengthen our resolve and hold ourselves to a higher level of accountability. It's time for us to assure that promises made are promises kept. We must demand action over rhetoric and evidence over ideology. It is time to deliver.

Conferences themselves are obviously not the answer to an epidemic. But they have reflected the evolution of the epidemic and our response---- and have helped to serve as a voice of conscience for our community. These conferences have evolved from small focused meetings of biomedical researchers and clinicians almost exclusively from rich northern countries to a diverse, inclusive forum of people representing all aspects of the response and communities throughout the world.

But it is not enough to pat ourselves on the back and feel good because we have bigger and bigger and more inclusive conferences if we don't use opportunities like this for their greatest strategic advantage. So we need to make sure we do at least three things while we are together this week:

First, we need to use these conferences to send a message to the world.

This is the opportunity to get the message out that HIV/AIDS is still a serious threat to humanity and that more needs to be done, in applying what we know and expanding our solutions. It is also a chance to say that it is not hopeless; we have more evidence of efforts that are working. And it's an opportunity to get the message out that we are not a divided community that let false dichotomies shift our real focus, but instead we stand firm and united in responding to HIV/AIDS and tackling the issues that undercut our efforts like stigma, poverty, gender inequality, racism, homophobia and lack of political will.

Second, we need to use these conferences to learn. We have more to share than ever about how to prevent, treat and provide care and support for HIV/AIDS and affected communities. And there *is* more new innovative research to expand our prevention and treatment options than ever. But still we continue to reinvent the wheel when we leave these meetings and go back to our daily lives as if the sharing of information was not meant to have impact on our actions. We must be willing to adapt our work based the on best new knowledge, if we want our efforts to be as effective and efficient as possible in saving lives.

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Third, we should use these conferences to reenergize ourselves and to redouble our commitment to the fight against HIV/AIDS and resolve to hold ourselves accountable for tangible progress when we meet in 2 years in Mexico. These conferences can no longer be thought about as isolated single events, but should instead be seen as part of a process that helps us mark our progress and give us an opportunity to show ourselves and the world that we can make tangible progress towards ending this epidemic. The 40 million people living with HIV/AIDS, their families and their communities deserve nothing less.

I step down as President of the International AIDS Society at the end of this conference. It has been an honor to be the President of the IAS, a membership association of over 10,000 professionals working on HIV/AIDS. It has also been a real honor to welcome the world, once again, to Canada which over the years has demonstrated real leadership on HIV/AIDS. I want to thank our Canadian hosts for all they have done to make this conference possible. I would like to thank our corporate, foundation, government, multilateral sponsors, and other sponsors who are listed in the program. Without your generous support this conference would not be possible. I would also like to thank Craig McClure and the wonderful staff of IAS who have put their heart and soul into making this conference successful and who I have had the fortune of working so closely with over the last 2 years as we worked to further the overall mission of the IAS.

Finally before I close and hand the podium over to my co-chair, I want to thank all of you who are in this room today who work tirelessly because you truly believe that the millions of women, men and children around the world will live or die because of our next steps.

I thank you.

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