

PRESENTATIONS BY THE REPRESENTATIVE

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***“Experience of the UN in Jamaica:
Lessons Learnt, Opportunities &
Challenges in Support to the National
Response to HIV/AIDS”***

Statement by

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Mr. President, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am grateful for the opportunity to address this body. It is indeed a rare chance for a Head of Agency to address the Joint Meeting of the Executive Board. I am acutely aware that I was not asked to come to deliver a long speech but because you consider it important to hear directly from those in the field on the progress towards implementing the recommendations of Global Task Team to improve the international response to the AIDS epidemic.

I will therefore be very concise, focusing on what I believe are the opportunities and challenges ahead and perhaps more importantly, on providing practical ideas on how to achieve the aim of engendering more effective support for the national responses to HIV/AIDS.

The thoughts I will share with you this morning are not only mine, they also reflect the thinking of my UN Country Team colleagues.

A robust national planning framework consisting of a National HIV/AIDS Strategic Plan linked to the Medium Term Social and Economic Framework

provides the basis for alignment and harmonization of the multilateral institutions, international partners and national stakeholders. In Jamaica, while efforts are ongoing towards achievement of full alignment, unsynchronized planning cycles, diverse programming modalities and divergent approaches continue to pose obstacles to the goal of achieving a harmonized support to the national response to HIV/AIDS. Further, compliance with vertical mandates often impairs the ability of the International Development Partners to align with other partners around the national development framework.

Functioning multi-level consultative mechanisms such as the National AIDS Committee (the country coordinating mechanism of the National AIDS Programme) have allowed for multi-level dialogue with ample participation of civil society, private sector and other stakeholders, including persons living with AIDS. Led by the Government and civil society representatives, these formal structures have been central platforms for planning, steering and making operational the national response to HIV/AIDS. However, further strengthening of these multi-stakeholder participatory mechanisms is required for them to effectively undertake the new two-way oversight and accountability responsibilities envisaged in the Global Task Team Report.

At the same time, an agreement between all International Development Partners to be guided by the jurisdiction of the two-way accountability framework could ensure that these arrangements become operationalized. In any case, before International Development Partners can agree to adhere to this scheme, unambiguous guidance – and even authorization – from their respective Head Offices would be needed.

The national response to HIV/AIDS is multi-sectoral in nature, with mutually reinforcing policy and technical levels including: public sector, civil society, private sector and academia. Commitment at the highest political level is necessary to lead the response for advocacy and to ensure adoption of an enabling legal and institutional framework. While a line Ministry spearheads the operational aspects of the response, leadership above the Ministerial level, engages the highest level of decision making, ensures policy coherence, operational coordination, and adequate resource allocation thus enabling the integrated approach.

The support of the international community and the UN System in particular must reflect this arrangement, engaging both Heads of Agencies as well as their technical teams. In this regard, the move to strengthen the UN

AIDS support structures by setting up a joint UN Team on AIDS with an associated joint programme, along with the related provision for the UN Theme Group to concentrate their efforts on policy and advocacy are steps in the right direction.

However, for the integrity of the new architecture to be assured, management arrangements, planning, reporting and accountability provisions between the UN Theme Group and the Joint Team must be streamlined in order to avoid coordination bottlenecks. In addition, exercising policy coherence requires steering authority over the joint programme. It is not clear at this point whether the UN Theme Group will be entrusted with this authority. By the same token, to be effective, the “advocacy” activities of the UNTG must be conceived in line with and be programmatically linked to the Joint Programme.

While the revamped UNAIDS architecture in the field is welcome, measures should be taken to ensure that the changes are not perceived as a “proliferation of bodies” nor adding complexity to the of UN support structures. Consistent with the idea of a “one-stop shop” for national counterparts, all UN support mechanisms should be referred to as a single

structure (i.e., UNAIDS Theme Group, UNAIDS Joint Team, UNAIDS Programme).

The UNAIDS Division of Labor provides an opportunity to adopt a more client oriented approach. In streamlining the submission of request for technical assistance, there should also be a single common entry point. Internally, the agencies should then decide, which agency would respond to the request according to the Distribution of Labor. One important point to make is that real capacity on the ground should also be taken into consideration when implementing the Distribution of Labor at the country level. In the typically multi-country coverage context of the Caribbean, Agency capacity at the sub-regional level is probably a better indicator of its ability to deliver than size or composition of the Country Office.

A key area of opportunity/challenge relating to harmonization and alignment is the simplification and harmonization of reporting requirements. A single, harmonized reporting framework is critical to national ownership but also instrumental to a strengthened and more effective monitoring and evaluation process. The UN Theme Group and the wider group of International Development Partners decided on this move even before the Global Task

Team recommended it. In fact, a task force has been working for some time now in order to provide recommendations for its implementation. Challenges persist to the extent that some things cannot be negotiated at the local level. For the time being, the solution has been the inclusion of all indicators on a single framework. The next logical step should be the reduction of indicators through consolidation and elimination.

Taking into consideration the fact that the typical UN office in the Caribbean has multi-country coverage, a key role the UN could play in the region in support of the HIV/AIDS response is in the areas of knowledge sharing, dissemination of best practices and South-South cooperation. This work could build upon the existing partnerships with the existing sub-regional response mechanism such as the CARICOM/Pan Caribbean Partnership Against HIV/AIDS (PANCAP), but will require a more coordinated engagement from the different UN agencies with these regional entities.

Additionally, innovative financing mechanisms are needed to engage effectively with the sub-regional mechanisms. In this regard, UNAIDS and the co-sponsor organizations should consider establishing a sub-regional Programme Acceleration Funds (PAF) window.

One area of continued concern for the Caribbean is the long term sustainability of the response to HIV/AIDS. Perhaps the Global Task Team's focus on the effectiveness of the resources currently available for combating the AIDS epidemic, (i.e. making the money work) meant that sustainability could not feature prominently in its recommendations. In the Caribbean context, this is a most important concern. Since the main criterion for eligibility to grant funding from Global Fund is income per-capita, as upper middle income countries, many Caribbean countries cannot or will not in the future, be eligible for grant funding. Using income as the paramount criterion masks the fact that as Small Island Developing States, these countries face special challenges in terms of capacity of the public and private sector, the lack of economies of scale and vulnerability to natural disasters.

Finally, the asymmetrical coverage and uneven presence of UN agencies in Jamaica and the sub-region has made it difficult to set up the UN Technical Groups in the past. The decision to establish the Joint Team on AIDS provides an opportunity for individual agencies to deploy additional assets that create a critical mass of resources for the Joint Team and the Joint

programme. In addition, pooling together resources from the sub-region could also help in assembling strong technical teams.