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AIDS 2012 Closing Session Speech

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Dear delegates and friends,

On this last day of a great and ground-breaking International AIDS Conference, and after two years of working under the leadership of a man I have great admiration for, Professor Elly Katabira, now is my turn to address you all in my new position as IAS President.

The 2012 International AIDS Conference has showcased top-level science and global and national leadership. Plenaries have been inspirational, and the whole program has allowed all delegates to go back to work next week with renewed energy and new partners. We have also shed light on controversial issues.

Today, I would like to focus on what I expect we can achieve in the next two years.

I am a scientist.

Like most of my colleagues, my whole career has been guided by the unique idea of contributing to Human health improvement and in particular in the field of HIV for the past thirty years.

I believe that implementing scientific evidences and best practices at every level of the HIV response is the way to ultimately tackle the epidemic. Scientific discoveries are meaningless if they remain in publications and drawers.

In 2012, it is unacceptable that more that 300 000 babies are born HIV infected whereas we have, since the 90's, the tools to prevent mother to child transmission. It is unacceptable that risk reduction strategies, including needle exchange programs, are not implemented everywhere when we know it is one of the most efficacious scientifically sound intervention to prevent HIV infection in injecting drug users.

This must end.

People living with HIV expect to benefit from the evidences and tools that science delivers.

We must all unite to ensure their needs translate into commitments by political leaders and decision makers.

I am an advocate.

In 2008 I had the great privilege to be awarded the Nobel Prize of medicine. This award does not belong to me but it is recognition of the unique movement of solidarity and tireless engagement from a community of people who have fought everyday over the past 30 years for better societies in which all citizens are equal regardless of their serological status, colour, gender, sexual orientation or identity, religious belief or behaviours. Every person, law, rule or custom that tells us otherwise is simply wrong.

As a Nobel Laureate it is my duty to put all my heart in defending the values that all of us here share in common:
- the equal access to prevention, treatment and care,

- the end of stigma, discrimination, violence, repressive policies wherever they are.

Can we accept that someone can be cast aside from health services because he is a man who has sex with men, she is a woman, he or she is a sex-worker, a transgender person or a drug user?

No.

Can we accept that a person living with HIV, a drug-user or a sex-worker will be denied entry to or be deported from a territory?

No.

I will keep on defending those values as I have tried to do all my life, at all levels of responsibility, from local to international political leaders and policy makers.

I am a woman.

Back in the 80's when the epidemic violently exploded, the very first successful information, education and prevention campaigns in Africa were those led by brave

women. Since then women have borne the burden disproportionately. Combating harmful social norms, promoting gender equality, empowering women is essential to boost HIV response for women and girls.

We must also take more consideration of women in research to address specific questions related to HIV infection in women and increase their representation in clinical trials.

Indeed, women are prominent in the work of the International AIDS Society. Professor Adeeba Kamarulzaman will be the co-chair of IAS 2013 and Professor Sharon Lewin will be the co-chair of AIDS 2014. We all speak our minds and we will get heard!

Enhancing prevention, care and treatment is central to the vision and mission of the International AIDS Society. Co-organizing the International AIDS Conference is one of the most powerful tools we have to meet those crucial objectives on the ground. The IAS priorities on Cure research, TasP implementation, elimination of stigma

and discrimination, inclusion of social and political research, or human rights for HIV professionals and efficiency and effectiveness of HIV programmes must all be reflected in the International AIDS Conference, and I take the pledge that this will be the case in AIDS 2014.

We have just lived a truly exciting week highlighting the remarkable contribution of thousand of individuals as well as the commitment of nations in putting an end to the AIDS epidemic.

But there are important deadlines in front of us. One year ago, Heads of States and Governments committed to have 15 million people on treatment by 2015. UNAIDS has strong objectives under the “Three Zeros strategy”. We all know that an AIDS-free generation is within reach.

We cannot miss any of those objectives. We will not accept going backwards.

In his video address at the Monday plenary, the French President, François Hollande, confirmed that France will remain highly committed to combat HIV. He also

announced the creation of a tax on financial transactions as early as the 1st of August as an innovative mechanism to fund solidarity. We should all call for other nations, in particular members of the G20, to follow the same path that will secure the financing of global health and development.

But money is not the only challenge we must overcome to end the epidemic. We have to address the gap that exists between operational science and implementation within resource limited settings. We have to build sustainable healthcare systems, we have to train professional health workers and reach out to all the patients. We have to open our minds to others and reach out to scientists, health care providers, communities and decision-makers outside the HIV field. We must act as one, and be more inclusive than we have been to date.

We have to call on the new generation, on young women and men, on young activists, young people living with HIV, young scientists, young health care providers, and young leaders. You are the generation with which we can end this epidemic one day. I have seen many of you at

this Conference in the past few days. We need you to be on the forefront with us if we are to meet those goals.

Yes we can end the epidemic, if we all stand together!

It will not only turn the tide on AIDS, but it will benefit all men, women & children all over the world from whatever the illness they are suffering from. What we are fighting for is the non negotiable fundamental right to health for all!

This is our commitment, this is our responsibility.

Thank you, and see you all in Melbourne in 2014.