

PRESS RELEASE

Podgorica, November 30th 2007

December 1st, World AIDS Day in Montenegro

The Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Welfare of Montenegro (MHLSW), the Institute of Public Health, NGO Juventas as representative of the NGO sector in Montenegro and representatives of the United Nations System in Montenegro jointly organized a press conference to mark World AIDS Day.

Around the world efforts are now underway to measure progress on promises made at the UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS (UNGASS: Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS) held in 2001. In this regard, the World AIDS Campaign is being conducted under the slogan **"STOP AIDS. Keep the Promise"**. The overall purpose of the campaign for the period between 2005-2010 is to ensure that leaders and decision-makers deliver on their promises to stop AIDS, including the provision of Plan of the Universal Access to HIV Treatment, Care, Support and Prevention services by 2010.

Within this five year period, World AIDS Day will be marked this year and next year through promotion of the theme **"Get Involved - Take the Lead"**. Since the beginning of the epidemic, experience has clearly demonstrated that significant advances in the response to HIV/AIDS have been achieved where there is a strong and committed leadership. Leaders are distinguished by their action, innovation and vision, their personal example and engagement of others. However, leadership should be demonstrated at every level of society - in families, communities, countries and internationally.

Even though HIV prevalence has levelled off, AIDS is still among the leading causes of death globally. The number of people living with HIV is now estimated at 33.2 million. With approximately 6,800 new infections and over 5,700 deaths each day due to AIDS, it is more than clear that we must expand our efforts to significantly reduce the impact of AIDS worldwide. Since 2001, the number of people living with HIV in Eastern Europe and Central Asia increased over 150%, and 90% of them are registered in Ukraine and Russia. Out of 6.8 million infected people living in low and middle-income countries, 76% does not have access to antiretroviral medication. The treatment access gap is even greater for children under 15. Only 8-13% of children in need of HIV treatment have access. Fewer than one in five of people at high risk for infection have access to effective prevention. Statistics speak for themselves.

The United Nations Theme Group (UN TG) on HIV/AIDS was established in Montenegro in July 2006 and since then has been contributing to the unified national response to HIV/AIDS through its UNAIDS Programme Acceleration Funds (PAF). The UN TG supported the preparation of the Report of the Universal access plan and Mid-Term Review on the National HIV/AIDS Strategy in Montenegro. This Report recognizes the areas of the highest achievements and points out the areas where activities should be intensified and improved, with an aim to give guidelines on how to make a stronger response to this disease.

The Mid-Term Report identified that the slowest progress was made in delivering of an essential package of interventions, at sufficient scale and intensity, to the groups most at


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risk. This is largely attributed to the stigma and discrimination towards the most vulnerable groups, including commercial sex workers, injecting drug users, men who have sex with men, refugees and displaced persons.

In order to raise public awareness, the UN System in Montenegro has produced 1,500 copies of human rights cards, designed to remind all those living with or affected by HIV/AIDS of their rights. Cards will be distributed widely, including: health institutions, voluntary and counselling testing centres, NGOs, prison institutions, Hospital for Mental Health Dobrota and other relevant institutions.

Reaching the 6th Millennium Development Goal (MDG) - Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, including halting and reversing the epidemic by 2015 requires far greater access to HIV prevention services and AIDS treatment, care and support than is currently available. As part of its efforts to inform public on the importance of this MDG, the UN TG is also planning to support two capacity building trainings for journalists, staff from health institutions and specialists for medical treatment and care delivery.

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The United Nations System in Montenegro is comprised of **FAO** (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations), **IOM** (International Organization for Migration), **UNDP** (United Nations Development Programme), **UNHCR** (The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), **UNICEF** (The United Nations Children's Fund), and the World Bank (**WB**).

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