World AIDS Day 2011

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This year’s global theme for the commemoration of World AIDS Day – “Getting to Zero: Zero New HIV Infections, Zero Discrimination and Zero AIDS-related deaths” – has a deeper meaning for Africa, a continent which unfortunately still bears the largest burden of the pandemic.

The high burden of HIV/AIDS has continued to prevail in Africa in spite of 10 years of robust economic growth here and resources deployed to combat the epidemic. With about 68% of all people living with HIV residing in Sub-Saharan Africa, the disease is a major threat for the continent. SSA accounted for 70% of new HIV infections in 2010. South Africa has the most people with HIV than any other country in the world, estimated at 5.6 million people.\(^1\)

HIV/AIDS affects all segments of society and threatens to destroy the fragile human capital fabric in Africa. With one billion people in Africa today and 2.3 billion projected for 2050, of which almost two-thirds are younger than 25 years old, this pandemic threatens to destroy the socio-economic fabric that took so long to build. HIV/AIDS leaves a void in the already small cohort of trained teachers, doctors, nurses, let alone the millions of children who will grow up without a father, mother or as an aid-orphan with few to no social safety nets.

Women and girls are the most vulnerable to the disease with about 76% of all HIV positive women in the world living in Africa. Within Sub-Saharan Africa, 59% of those affected by HIV/AIDS are women.

Achieving better value for money spent on health is even more critical today in view of the current economic context and the financing shortfall for AIDS. The need is to change the way we do business by crafting evidence-based policies, strategies, and budgets, and adopting innovative financing mechanisms such as performance-based financing which provide incentives for better performance and strengthens domestic accountability.

Our efforts to fight this global killer must be collective and embrace all actors in the health sector to define sustainable responses to HIV/AIDS. To “get to zero”, the African Development can act as a convener between actors in international health scene and ministries of finance in our regional member countries. More importantly, we need to build institutional mechanisms throughout the continent to enhance people’s voice and boost the role of civil society toward improved health services and greater accountability.

\(^1\) UNAIDS World Aids Report 2011.
As the premier financial development institution in Africa, the African Development Bank will continue to support the fight against HIV/AIDS by:

- Accelerating our response to regional member countries, especially fragile states, using innovation in science and technology as a platform for more cost effective HIV/AIDS interventions;

- Increased collaboration with our partners, such as UNAIDS;

- Supporting African higher learning institutions, medical schools and centers of excellence in training high quality staff.