

Impact of HIV/AIDS on International Peace and Security

7 June 2011, United Nations Security Council Chamber

Statement by Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon addressing the United Nations Security Council

Your Excellency President Ali Bongo Ondimba, President of the Gabonese Republic,

Distinguished Heads of State and Government,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I thank His Excellency President Ali Bongo Odimba for convening this important meeting. I greatly appreciate Gabon's leadership in tabling the vital resolution that Council members have just adopted. Now is the time for bold action.

More than ten years ago, then US Ambassador, Richard Holbrooke, pushed for the first discussion of HIV and AIDS in this Council chamber. Ambassador Holbrooke was the consummate diplomat, but he was determined to raise the issue of HIV and AIDS even when it was undiplomatic.

I commend the initiative of President Ali Bongo Odimba. I am glad that, for the second time, the UN Security Council is discussing this important issue in parallel with the General Assembly.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

We have come a long way since health issues were first discussed in this Council. I continue to bring AIDS to the Council's attention on scores of occasions through my reports on sexual and gender-based violence and when we highlight the important contributions of women to peace and security. Whenever AIDS is part of the equation, the United Nations is working to be part of the solution. This began when resolution 1308 was adopted in 2000. Now, UNAIDS, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and a number of governments are training our blue helmets and troops in different countries to make a difference.

Excellencies,

Commitment starts at the top. I am raising this issue directly with world leaders. And my senior aides are equally passionate about our AIDS response. In Timor-Leste, my former Special Representative stepped up to test for HIV. The deputy quickly followed. So did the UN police commissioner, the deputy police commissioner and many others. They were getting information on their health, setting an example and countering fear, stigma and discrimination. In Lebanon, our Force Commander organized an event on World AIDS Day on prevention. Then and there, a contingent commander decided to be tested. Many of his troops were encouraged by his leadership. They also volunteered.

For our personnel, pre-deployment HIV training is standard. We have trained over 1,500 peacekeepers as peer counsellors. The number of blue helmets seeking voluntary counselling and testing increased from fewer than 2,000 to more than 14,000 in just five years. But we are not just helping our peacekeepers – they work so people recovering from war do not also have to recover from disease. It is all part of the broader mission this Council entrusts to our troops: to stop gender and sexual-based violence; to enhance the role of women; and to protect children. And it is part of a broader international campaign: the Global Strategy on Women's and Children's Health. In conflict zones, in refugee camps - anywhere people fear for their lives - women, young people and children are more vulnerable to contracting HIV.

Before resolution 1308 was adopted, uniformed personnel were viewed in terms of the risk they might pose to civilians. Now we understand that UN troops and police are part of prevention, treatment and care. For example, we are working in Côte d'Ivoire, which has the highest prevalence of HIV in West Africa. The UN peacekeeping mission, UNOCI and UN co-sponsors are training troops and police on HIV, human rights and gender equality.

They are also providing technical support on HIV in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes. By making HIV prevention part of our DDR activities, we can protect civilians from HIV. We can reduce discrimination. And we can help former soldiers living with HIV get the care and treatment they deserve.

Excellencies,

We have to talk about sensitive issues when it comes to HIV and AIDS. And we must be frank about where we are falling short. The Council has made major strides in addressing sexual violence in conflict. But rape is still a weapon of choice. This is an atrocious human rights violation. It is a war crime. And it is a public health threat. Women and girls are extremely vulnerable as victims – but more than that, they are agents of progress and change. I urge all Member States to link efforts to combat HIV and AIDS with our campaigns against sexual violence and for the rights of women. That means addressing the dangerous interaction between AIDS, the international drug trade, sex trafficking and the abuse of women. This problem is not getting the attention it deserves. We also need action after the ink dries on agreements and the guns fall silent. We need to help shattered societies prevent the spread of HIV. And we must provide treatment to everyone who needs it.

We can get the job done with our regional partners as long as we involve civil society organizations – the activists, researchers and health workers who have brought us so far. Today we are marking 30 years of our struggle against AIDS. But let us focus on a different number: zero. Let us get to no new infections, no discrimination and no AIDS-related deaths. That is our goal.

Thank you very much.