



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**Message from Ms Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO
on the occasion of *World AIDS Day***

1 December 2013

This *World AIDS Day* is an opportunity to celebrate much progress.

Globally, new HIV infections are down 33 percent in 2012 from 2001. New infections among children have dropped even further, down 52 percent to 260,000. Since the peak in 2005, AIDS-related deaths have dropped by 30 percent, thanks largely to some 10 million people in low- and middle-income countries receiving life-saving antiretroviral treatment. The United Nations is set to exceed its goal of ensuring that 15 million people receive treatment by 2015.

All of this is positive, but fragile.

There are worrisome signs that social and behavioural programmes may now have a lower priority than before. Advances have been slow in ensuring respect of human rights and in securing access to HIV services for people most at risk of HIV infection. For people using drugs, there has been little change in the HIV burden, and HIV prevalence among people who inject drugs remains high – up to 28 percent in Asia. Preventing violence against women and girls, a key factor in vulnerability to HIV, remains a serious problem.

Young people continue to be a priority target for global action. This group still requires effective HIV and sexuality education programmes, access to high-quality and youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services, and the elimination of sexual violence against young women and girls.

UNESCO is sharpening its work in this area. In Eastern and Southern Africa, we have spearheaded a new initiative with UNAIDS -- and its cosponsors including UNICEF, UNFPA and WHO -- in a region where every hour still brings 50 new HIV infections amongst young people. A new UNESCO Report, entitled *Young People Today -- Time to Act Now*, compiles evidence on the situation facing young people in 21 countries of the region, calling for urgent action to ensure that young people have access to comprehensive sexuality education as well as sexual and reproductive health services. This Report is a key reference for country consultations that will lead to a summit of ministers of education and health from the region, to be held in Cape Town, South Africa, on 7 December 2013. This will be an opportunity for all to redouble their commitment to strong action.

UNESCO has chaired the *UNAIDS Committee of Cosponsoring Organizations* throughout this year. In this capacity, I have led discussions on how the eleven United Nations cosponsors of UNAIDS and its Secretariat will accelerate action to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, and what we will collectively do to support countries beyond 2015, in a world where HIV and AIDS requires that we use every resource available to overcome this terrible epidemic. There is progress across the world, but the stakes remain high and we must not tire in accelerating momentum.

Irina Bokova