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Организация  
Объединенных Наций по  
вопросам образования,  
науки и культуры

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للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、  
科学及文化组织

**Message from the Director-General of UNESCO,  
on the occasion of  
World AIDS Day 2009**

**1 December 2009**

The theme of this year's World AIDS Day focuses our attention on the interrelationship between human rights and the goal of Universal Access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. Clearly, it will not be possible to achieve Universal Access without fully respecting the universality of human rights, regardless of a person's age, sex, ethnicity, occupation, religious beliefs, and sexual orientation, with a particular concern for those most at risk and vulnerable to HIV infection.

All people have the right to education, information and services that will enable them to avoid HIV infection, and for those living with HIV, to have the best possible quality of life free from stigma and discrimination.

In recent years there have been substantial gains in the number of people receiving life-prolonging antiretroviral therapy in low- and middle-income countries, totalling 4 million by December 2008, which represents an increase of 1 million from the previous year. More people were counselled and tested for HIV in 2008 than in previous years. Almost half of all pregnant women living with HIV in low- and middle-income countries received antiretrovirals to prevent mother-to-child transmission, and more children living with HIV are benefiting from treatment and care programmes than ever before.


These gains represent important progress and hope. However, we must do much more to ensure that the over 5 million people needing antiretroviral therapy in low- and middle-income countries gain access to it. We must also not forget that with 33 million people living with HIV and 2.7 million new infections in 2007, the HIV epidemic continues to be a major global challenge.

We must also do more to safeguard the recent gains, which may well be under threat from the global economic and financial crisis. It is at this time that we must demonstrate even greater resolve and commitment, redouble our efforts to prevent new infections, and support those who are infected and affected by HIV.

For UNESCO, as for other partners in the AIDS response, this means working harder and working together, within a framework of respect for human rights as a cornerstone of effective and equitable national responses to HIV.

To ensure genuine multisectoral responses to the AIDS epidemic, we will continue to draw on UNESCO's broad technical capacity to promote approaches that are rights-based and driven by the best evidence available on what works. One example of this is a forthcoming guide developed by UNESCO on the essential characteristics of efficient and effective HIV and AIDS responses. The guide is designed to explain, in a user-friendly and accessible format, what these essential characteristics are, what they mean in practice, and how they can be applied, integrated and institutionalized into HIV and AIDS planning and programme processes. It builds on the strengths and resources of UNESCO's sectors, institutes and field offices, and will support UNESCO staff and other partners to promote responses which are rights-based, scientifically accurate and grounded on evidence, culturally appropriate, gender responsive, age-specific and participatory and inclusive.

When looking at how all of us can maintain and strengthen our engagement in the AIDS response, I am fully committed that UNESCO will continue to address the social and structural factors that fuel the epidemic, including gender inequality and stigma and discrimination, and to empower young people to make healthy, informed decisions. We must build on our strengths, and move forward in concert with our partners.



Irina Bokova