

## World AIDS Day

*UN Says Leadership, Empowerment and Delivering on Promises are Key to the Somali AIDS response*

**1 December 2008  
Somalia**

December 1, 2008 marks the 20th anniversary of World AIDS Day, and is being observed with the theme “*Lead – Empower – Deliver.*” Designating leadership as the theme provides an opportunity to highlight both political leadership and celebrate leadership that has been witnessed at all levels of society. In Somalia, conflict and humanitarian emergencies continue to increase the vulnerability to HIV infection among the conflict and emergency affected populations.

There has been a significant progress in bringing life-saving treatment and preventative services to people who need them in all regions of Somalia. At present, over 1200 people are receiving care and treatment, and more pregnant women have access to interventions for prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (PMTCT). Young women and men provide services as peer educators; religious leaders participate in dissemination HIV awareness and prevention messages and encourage communities to effectively engage in the AIDS response. While stigma and discrimination related to HIV continues to be a major challenge, the Somali AIDS response has made progress in the development of strategies to reach out to populations most-at-risk of HIV infections. Resources have been mobilized to implement a new strategy addressing the drivers and risk factors that fuel the HIV epidemic in Somali communities, from port cities to border towns, among displaced populations in humanitarian emergencies and vulnerable groups in urban settings.

There are many challenges ahead of us. For the Somali AIDS response to achieve its universal access targets by 2010, there is need for increased Somali ownership and meaningful participation at all levels, and to increase scale of interventions to a level that will halt and reverse the spread of HIV, with a focus on key strategic priorities. There is need for sustained and informed dialogue in communities and among leaders in Somali society. This can be achieved through increased participation of people living with HIV, networks of women, girls, and young people through Somali civil society, and international partners, with Somali leadership in all regions. We need to further strengthen and empower communities and local governments, develop and implement strategies that address gender inequalities and empower communities to exercise their human rights, and promote their meaningful engagement in planning and decision making processes at various levels.

Today, as we observe the World AIDS Day through various activities in all regions of Somalia, we call on governments, Somali civil society and the international community to continue to deliver on promises made to “Lead-Empower-Deliver” in the fight against HIV and AIDS.

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If you would like to have further information or wish to learn how you can participate in the Somali AIDS response, please contact Ms. Salma Taher: [tahers@unaids.org](mailto:tahers@unaids.org)