Zero complacency: Accelerated action on MDG 6 in Eastern Europe & Central Asia

Joint Statement on behalf of the International Co-chairs
MDG 6 Forum in Eastern Europe and Central Asia
Moscow, 10-12 October 2011

Attaining the MDGs: critical to human development and economic progress

Meeting in Moscow with just four years to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), we appreciate the urgency of the task before us; but its opportunity too. While we commend the region for being on track to reach several of the MDGs, progress towards one goal is faltering dangerously: MDG 6, the pledge to combat HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis (TB) and other infectious diseases.

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and the World Bank therefore laud the efforts of this Forum, and the leadership of the Russian Federation, to respond boldly to this urgent situation. We are convinced that charting a renewed and regionally focused approach to reach the targets of MDG 6 is critical to the region’s continued development and prosperity. Complacency is not an option.

MDG 6: an unfinished agenda

The region is experiencing some of the fastest-growing HIV epidemics in the world. Half of all new HIV infections in the region are attributed to injecting drug use, and more than two-thirds of people living with HIV who inject drugs are infected with hepatitis C.

Stigma, discrimination and homophobia stand in the way of bringing health services to men who have sex with men in the region. Prisoners and sex workers also remain highly vulnerable to HIV.

Meanwhile, the region contains more than half of the world’s high-burden, multi-drug resistant-TB (MDR-TB) countries. Outbreaks of cholera, vaccine-preventable conditions such as poliomyelitis and other “forgotten illnesses” must also be addressed as priorities.

Positive indications of regional progress

While HIV, TB and other infectious diseases remain grave threats, the region has made significant progress. Service coverage to prevent vertical transmission of HIV exceeds 90%, indicating that the elimination of new HIV infections in children is possible.

Access to antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) has expanded rapidly and public-sector spending on MDG 6 has increased substantially over the last few years. Countries in the region recently
struck blows against stigma and discrimination by eliminating travel restrictions for people living with HIV and improving access to harm reduction services. TB incidence rates are declining, and countries in the region have emerged as leaders in the movement to integrate disease-specific programmes into health systems.

Global political commitment to MDG 6 is strong. All UN Member States agreed to several ambitious goals at the High Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS in June 2011. Strong political will to prioritize MDG 6 efforts in the region will be the single most important element for success. It must be supported and sustained by mutually accountable regional cooperation as well as by a vibrant and engaged civil society and private sector.

### Guiding global agenda

2015 targets from the 2011 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS and The Global Plan to Stop TB 2011-2015

- Reduce TB prevalence and death rates by 50 per cent
- Eliminate mother-to-child transmission of HIV and substantially reduce AIDS-related maternal deaths
- Reduce transmission of HIV among people who inject drugs by 50 per cent
- Reduce sexual transmission of HIV by 50 per cent
- Ensure 15 million people living with HIV are on antiretroviral treatment

### Investing in MDG 6: Closing the gap and investing more strategically

This Forum should serve to catalyze action towards closing the gap in investment needs. Any investment that is deferred today will have a multiplier effect on investment needs in the future. Therefore, long-term, predictable financing must be secured now. This will require scaling up international and domestic investments and continuing to promote innovative financing mechanisms.

Closing the investment gap also requires smarter spending in the region. Disease programmes must better respond to epidemiological priorities, risk and vulnerability, including multiple and overlapping risks. They must focus on the needs of key populations, including people who inject drugs, sex workers and men who have sex with men—as well as those of women and girls. We urge decision makers to review and redress laws and policies that hinder access to services which remains a major challenge in the region.

TB and MDR-TB constitute a major public health challenge in the region and threaten progress against MDG 6. The response to this challenge has to be two-pronged: (1) minimizing the emergence of drug resistance through applying high quality, basic TB control; and (2) scaling up management of MDR-TB. TB/HIV co-infection also requires urgent attention, increased resources for delivery of integrated TB/HIV services and the provision of harm reduction services including in prison settings.
Progress under MDG 6 is critically dependent on focused financing for and successful implementation of cost-effective and evidence-informed interventions for the most vulnerable populations.

We hope that regional decision makers will be inspired by the holistic approach to achieving MDG 6 demonstrated by the Forum. We urge you to identify policy and programmatic synergies with other MDGs and align efforts with global health initiatives—such as the Global Strategy for Women’s and Children’s Health—in ways that are both cost-effective and responsive to the real needs of people.

UNAIDS, the World Bank, the Global Fund, Stop TB and other partners will support such alignment, renewing our efforts to maximize value-for-money and make breakthrough progress by focusing on “high impact” countries—including the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

**Strengthening cooperation: Leadership, shared responsibility and mutual accountability**

We recommit to renewed efforts to implement the principles and actions set out in the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action. The forthcoming conference in Busan on Aid Effectiveness provides an opportunity for the region to demonstrate its leadership in the planned Global Partnership for Development to support mutual learning and accountability in the shift from aid effectiveness to development effectiveness.

Accounting for over 60% of the HIV epidemic in the region, there can be no victory without the Russian Federation in the lead.

The 2006 G8 Summit in St. Petersburg was the first to highlight global health and infectious diseases as a common priority. Now pushing to ensure that the G8 meets its global health financing commitments, the Russian Federation is fueling the movement and momentum for shared responsibility. The Russian Federation plays leading roles in a range of organizations which are critical to the success of the MDGs, including the G8, G20, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Newly Independent States, Commonwealth of Independent States, Eurasian Economic Community and the BRICS. This presents a unique opportunity to strengthen its leadership in global health, to fortify emerging global health governance mechanisms and to foster and support a reinvigorated regional response to MDG 6.

The Russian Federation is also an important scientific power and partner in innovation, as we see in the promising research on HIV vaccines conducted by the Vektor centre. An equal commitment for cost-effective national responses to HIV and TB will yield positive impact on progress towards MDG 6.

Harnessing positive lessons learned and leadership in many countries of the region, we seek to strengthen partnerships through shared responsibility and mutual accountability, and foster country ownership of disease programmes by actively supporting and strengthening the capacity of national institutions, community systems and human resources for health.

We urge regional decision makers to ensure inclusive and transparent leadership, to listen to the voices of people living with HIV and other key populations, including women’s networks, and create space for national debate on priorities, strategic investments, social protection
and legal measures to achieve MDG 6. A commitment to uphold the dignity and human rights of every individual and to promote gender equality should guide all that we do.

**Moving forward: taking responsibility, taking action**

As the MDG 6 Forum International Co-Chairs, we look forward to the bold Action Plan to be launched at the Forum and commit to taking the actions relevant to the mandates of our organizations to support the attainment of MDG 6 in the region. We will do so by mobilizing resources, providing technical support to strengthen institutions, fostering dialogue and brokering partnerships, promoting evidence-informed policy and upholding principles of human rights and development effectiveness.

We fully support the establishment and ongoing work of the proposed group of experts to monitor development cooperation for MDG 6, and look forward to engaging in further reviews of progress in the region, including the 2013 mid-term assessment and the second MDG 6 Forum in Eastern Europe and Central Asia to be held in 2014 to discuss a post-2015 development cooperation framework for the region.

We commit to supporting countries and other partners across the region to seize the tremendous opportunities through renewed and more strategic and effective partnerships to ensure that each of the MDG 6 targets are attained and lead to economic prosperity and human dignity in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.