



# PRESS RELEASE



UN OFFICE OF THE HIGH REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES,  
LANDLOCKED DEVELOPING COUNTRIES AND SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

## SITUATION OF HIV/AIDS IN LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

### WORSENER BY “UNSUSTAINABLE DEBT BURDEN”

## UN UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL CALLS FOR GREATER

### AWARENESS AND ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

### TO COPE WITH THE PANDEMIC

**United Nations, 24 February 2005:** At a panel discussion on how women in least developing countries face the challenge of HIV/AIDS, the United Nations Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, Anwarul K. Chowdhury called on the international community to remain focused on the challenge of HIV/AIDS. “It is imperative that we continue to stay focused on this challenge, as we aspire to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and the goals of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries,” he said at the United Nations today.

A publication titled, *Hope: Building Capacity: Least Developed Countries Meet the HIV/AIDS Challenge*, jointly published by UN-OHRLLS and UNDP, was launched by Mr. Chowdhury and the Assistant Administrator and Director of UNDP, Shoji Nishimoto.

During his opening remarks, Mr. Chowdhury said that the efforts in building and developing human and institutional capacity in most of these countries have been affected by challenges that include recurring natural disasters, extremely poor health, sanitation and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS.

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Referring to the debt burden faced by least developed countries, Mr. Chowdhury said, “The situation has been further exacerbated by an unsustainable debt burden. During 2002, LDCs paid about \$5.1 billion in their debt-servicing obligations.”

He said that debt service payments diverted a large part of scarce resources from crucial programmes of education, healthcare and in battling the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Debt servicing in some Least Developed Countries like Senegal, Malawi and Sao Tome and Principe absorbs about 30% of the public income.

“It is a critical challenge for these countries as they are forced to choose between servicing their debts and investing in health and education and tackling poverty and HIV/AIDS which are essential for building and developing their human and institutional capacity.”

Calling it the most complex development challenge of our time, Mr. Chowdhury said, “Women whose families have been affected by HIV/AIDS and are engaged in various vocations have to divide their time in nursing the sick, nursing themselves and earning livelihood for their families and households.”

Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Atoki Ileka spoke of the special conditions of women in conflict situations. He said, “AIDS is a threat to the security of a country. The majority of people infected by HIV/AIDS are women, often victims of violence. There is a need for radical change and countries must make every effort to ensure that women and children are protected.” Referring to the steps taken by his Government, he said that an aggressive programme has been launched against HIV/AIDS with the help of civil society, public and private sectors and United Nations agencies. He commended the role of UN-OHRLLS in conducting advocacy programmes for HIV/AIDS on behalf of the Least Developed Countries.

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Ms. Nafis Sadik, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on HIV/AIDS in Asia, called on countries to change existing laws that support violence against women. “While microcredit in rural areas has empowered women, they are ready to fight for their rights. Governments must support them and open up access to economic opportunities,” she emphasized.

HIV/AIDS Activist Maria Ndhlovu spoke about her experience of being infected with HIV and called for more awareness and education, especially in the area of gender equality. “Unfortunately the world has not noticed the suffering of women infected with HIV/AIDS,” she remarked. She emphasized the breaking of the silence about HIV/AIDS, and said that in order to cope with the disease it was important to talk about it with others who are infected.

Focusing on the aspect of vulnerability, the Director of USAIDS, Desmond Johns said, “The Least Developed Countries have heightened vulnerability to AIDS because of poverty and gender inequality. Indeed, the LDCs are faced with a double challenge: heavy debt burden and HIV/AIDS.”

**NOTE: The publication, *Hope: Building Capacity: Least Developed Countries Meet the HIV/AIDS Challenge*, jointly published by UN-OHRLS and UNDP, is available from the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States. Please email: [ohrlls-unhq@un.org](mailto:ohrlls-unhq@un.org) to request a copy.**

For further information, please contact: **Nosh Nalavala**, Media Officer, United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (917) 367-2471, e-mail: [nalavala@un.org](mailto:nalavala@un.org). Website: <http://www.un.org/ohrlls/>