

Enhancing the Parliamentary Response to the HIV/AIDS Crisis

Statement by the IPU President Hon. Pier Ferdinando Casini

Colleagues,
Friends,

HIV/AIDS is undoubtedly the single greatest public health challenge we face in this century. More than 40 million people worldwide suffer from HIV/AIDS, and more than 15 million children have been orphaned by the pandemic.

The damage caused by the virus to decades of development is incalculable. At the same time, the link between HIV/AIDS and poverty is now fully acknowledged, and no program to stem the epidemic will be successful without taking on board this fundamental relationship.

The Government of the United States has been unstinting in its generosity in allocating funds to prevention, treatment and care. Only last week the President of the United States urged Congress to authorize an additional 30 billion dollars to fight AIDS in Africa over the next five years. The USA stands as the global leader – by far – in funding the fight against the disease.

Too often I have heard parliaments described as the “missing link” in the fight against AIDS. As President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, I say this must stop, and parliaments must join the struggle in a worldwide endeavor. I do not mean that parliaments have not played their part, both individually and regionally, but what we need now is a global coordinated effort by all legislatures.

We have taken the first steps. This afternoon we will be hearing more about the work of the IPU Advisory Group on HIV/AIDS, which comes to us fresh from its first field visit to Brazil, a country that has played a pioneering role through its far-sighted national AIDS program.

The involvement of parliaments in combating the pandemic is multiform. The fundamental duty of any parliament is to pass laws and to oversee their

proper implementation, and this applies to public health concerns as much as to anything else. Where necessary, the parliament should also undertake legislative reform. This is especially true of the area of human rights and HIV/AIDS, where the delicate balance between the collective welfare and the inalienable rights of the individual calls for balanced and informed legislative work.

Parliamentarians are also leaders. They have unparalleled opportunities to use the power of example to break down the barriers of stigma and ignorance, both locally and nationally. Leadership is the theme of this year's World Aids Day, and under that theme I will be convening a world conference of parliaments, in conjunction with World AIDS Day, to make a searching examination of how parliaments can weigh in more effectively as leaders and advocates in helping to stop this epidemic in its tracks.

The world organization of parliaments stands ready to assist in this vital cause. The IPU is ready to play its part. I look forward to a stimulating round of discussions this afternoon that will show us the way forward.

Thank you.