

Good evening and welcome to the 2011 World AIDS Day celebration.

The World AIDS Day theme this year is “Getting to Zero.” Zero New HIV Infections; Zero Discrimination and Zero AIDS Related Deaths. I’d like to take a few minutes to talk to you about some of the components of the campaign and share my thoughts. This campaign is created and backed by the United Nations. It starts in 2011 and runs until 2015; it builds on last year’s successful World AIDS Day “Light for Rights” initiative encompassing a range of vital issues identified by key affected populations.

You might ask, why are we looking at the global landscape of HIV/AIDS? I have asked myself that many times as I have worked to secure adequate funding for the programs, the care and treatment of Nebraskans with HIV and AIDS. But I have to continuously remind myself that we have a wealth of resources here in the US. That there are countries that can’t access the medications and treatments that are at our fingertips. That this is a global epidemic and Nebraska isn’t immune to the needs of people in the Sudan, Somalia or Myanmar. Nebraska is the 26<sup>th</sup> largest refugee resettlement state in the nation and is a key locale for secondary migration. It makes you reframe your thoughts, doesn’t it?

As we look to the theme for the next several years, we need to think about how we get from “here” to zero. Do we have to get to zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination of people living with HIV/AIDS *and* zero AIDS related deaths all together, all at once? Anyone who is working towards these goals can choose one, two or all three. For example, Linda Mafu, Director of World AIDS Campaign Africa says: “The potential for creative, connected and meaningful campaigning is really exciting. Our organization will focus on Zero AIDS Related Deaths, but the choice is there for others to pick a different zero or all three. The World AIDS Campaign focus on “Zero AIDS Related Deaths” signifies a push towards greater access to treatment for all; a call for governments to act now. A demand [that] they honor promises like the Abuja declaration and that African Governments at [the] very least hit agreed targets for domestic spending on health and HIV in support of the human right to the best attainable level of health care for all. It’s a global campaign that spotlights

how our fundamental right to health is intrinsically and inextricably linked to other basic rights – The right to food, to shelter, to freedom, to clean water and safety. Crucial too is access to affordable life saving quality medicines free from the crippling effects of excessive profit taking. In the coming months the World AIDS Campaign will be spotlighting a range of Getting to Zero initiatives to help see an end to AIDS related deaths.”

The vision for this year’s World AIDS Day and beyond may seem lofty but the journey towards its attainment is laid with concrete milestones. There are ten goals for 2015. These goals are:

- Reduce sexual transmission of HIV by half, including among young people, men who have sex with men and transmission in the context of sex work;
- Eliminate vertical transmission, or mother-to-child, of HIV and reduce AIDS-related maternal deaths by half;
- Prevent all new HIV infections among people who use drugs.
- Make access to antiretroviral therapy or more specifically, HIV medications, universal for all people living with HIV who are eligible for treatment;
- Reduce TB deaths among people living with HIV by half;
- Ensure that all people living with HIV and every households affected by HIV are addressed in all national social protection strategies and have access to essential care and support.
- Reduced by half the number of countries with punitive laws and practices around HIV transmission, sex work, drug use or homosexuality that block effective responses;
- Eliminate HIV-related restrictions on entry, stay and residence by half in the countries that have such restrictions;
- Ensure that HIV-specific needs of women and girls are addressed in at least half of all national HIV responses;
- Zero tolerance for gender-based violence.

One of the targets for any goal or objective that we try to create in HIV/AIDS work and in other areas of public health is that they be **specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-phased**. We will consider the S.M.A.R.T. algorithm in regards to the Getting to Zero campaign

Are these goals **specific**? Most definitely. The goals are designed so that there is no chance for misinterpretation.

Are they **measurable**? Yes. There are local, regional, national and international organizations that collect and report statistical data on HIV transmission, deaths and other relevant topics. We can determine our process to goal very easily over time with this campaign.

Are the goals **achievable**? I believe that all 10 of these goals are achievable. With the agencies on the front lines that provide prevention, interventions, care and treatment I think that we have advocates all over the world that can assist in achieving every goal set forth here. The rubber hits the road for many of us in the HIV/AIDS arena when we receive the needed funding from government agencies. I believe that will be the real test. For example, as I researched for this event, I found an article about the Global Fund cancelling funding. This excerpt is from an article dated November 24, 2011:

The Global Fund to Fight HIV, Tuberculosis (TB) and Malaria has cancelled its next round of funding and cut off countries like Russia, China and Brazil after donors failed to deliver US\$2.2 billion in previously committed funding. Emergency funding measures will now be put in place for some countries.

This is frightening news, however, there are so many advocates for the HIV/AIDS community that I have faith that funding will be restored, or come from other sources. Stakeholders in the fight against HIV/AIDS will ensure that there will be no silence regarding this dearth of funding.

Are these **reasonable** goals? Absolutely. Each of these goals are not only reasonable but imperative to the health and wellbeing of the global community. We aren't just individual continents, countries, or even states any longer. When I worked in the field of HIV testing, we didn't worry so

much about HIV-2 because that strain of the virus was typically found in sub-Saharan Africa. Now, each of the tests manufactured and sold around the globe tests for a number of strains of HIV because sub-Saharan Africa has reached the US, has reached Nebraska and covers the entire globe.

And **time-phased** – yes. We will work to reach all ten of these goals by 2015. You, me, people in Russia, Uzbekistan, Laos, France, Australia, Brazil, Haiti, Cuba, Guam and Canada. It is a grand undertaking, but we are up to the task. And we've made progress on some of the goals already.

The first example is that we have advocates and stakeholders who are creating a Positive Women's Network that is national and regional in its origins. This is a grassroots effort based on the needs of women infected and affected by HIV/AIDS to have a voice in research, funding and other facets of the HIV arena. An amazing act of self-empowerment that has been too long in coming.

Secondly, the International Conference on AIDS will be held in Washington DC in July 2012. This is the first time since the beginning of the international conference that it has been held on US soil. The reason: the US did not allow non-US citizens with HIV to visit, reside or immigrate to the US. In some instances there may have been exceptions such as with refugees, but for the most part the US banned entry for those individuals. Since that ban has been lifted, we will be graced by this international community of researchers, educators, clinicians, stakeholders and HIV+ persons.

And the final example that I will share with you tonight is that there is progress being made towards reducing HIV infections, despite poor funding. In an article dated November 21, 2011 from Nairobi by *PlusNews*, we received this news:

New HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths have continued to fall, and the number of people on treatment has risen to nearly 50 percent of those eligible,

despite an overall fall in global funding, states a UNAIDS report.

The **2011 UNAIDS World AIDS Day report** shows that 2.7 million people were newly infected with HIV in 2010 - a reduction of 21 percent since 1997 - while some 6.6 million people now have access to life-prolonging antiretroviral drugs, an increase of 1.35 million since 2009.

"Even in a very difficult financial crisis, countries are delivering results in the AIDS response," said Michel Sidibé, executive director of UNAIDS, in a statement. "We have seen a massive scale-up in access to HIV treatment which has had a dramatic effect on the lives of people everywhere."

So, yes, there is a long way to go to get to zero but we can manage. It cannot only be the person who runs that local AIDS service organization, or the state employee responsible for oversight of funding the local agencies. It must be a collaborative commitment and purpose. Community advocates and stakeholders must come forth to advocate for increased funding for prevention, treatment and care, for the reduction of stigma and discrimination against persons living with HIV and AIDS and to realize the goals set forth by the UN.

How do we Get to Zero? We Get to Zero by realizing that we all have a role to play in the fight against HIV and AIDS, and that role is more than one annual donation, more than just caring about the cause. We all have to be a part of the cause, whether in the background as support or out front as an advocate, a stakeholder or an activist. We all have to take an active, and yes, we will Get to Zero.

## **NEWS IN BRIEF**

- HIV/AIDS: Global Fund cancels funding
- SOUTH AFRICA: Activists urge change to patent laws
- HIV/AIDS: "Unprecedented progress", despite poor funding
- RWANDA: Criminalization of sex work hinders HIV prevention efforts
- UGANDA: Once upon an epidemic