



International Treatment Preparedness Coalition

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AIDS Treatment Activists Push UNAIDS and WHO to Meet Commitments to Reduce HIV in Women and Newborns

UNAIDS Executive Director Calls for Action to Improve Delivery of PMTCT

GENEVA – In a dramatic meeting today at the UNAIDS headquarters in Geneva, members of the International Treatment Preparedness Coalition (ITPC) and AIDS-Free World met with the leaders and approximately 100 staff members of UNAIDS and WHO to present ITPC’s latest *Missing the Target* report, *Failing Women, Failing Children: HIV, Vertical Transmission and Women’s Health*, which identifies the failure of the international community in preventing vertical transmission (also known as prevention of mother-to-child transmission or PMTCT).

Citing the research from six countries, ITPC and AIDS-Free World made a strong case that governments and UN agencies have failed to meet their commitment to reduce HIV infection in newborns. In the discussion that followed, almost everyone in the room acknowledged the failure, and Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS issued a call to action to significantly improve delivery of prevention of vertical transmission as a critical step on the road to universal access. “We welcome the personal commitment made by Mr. Sidibé to ensure that the rhetoric to place women at the center of the AIDS response is matched by specific programs and increased budgets. ITPC will continue to monitor governments and UN agencies as they deliver on the goal of universal access,” said Aditi Sharma, coordinator of the ITPC report.

Speaking on a media conference call after the meeting, Stephen Lewis, co-director of AIDS-Free World, who co-authored the report’s preface, said, “There was tremendous excitement when the idea of preventing vertical transmission was originally put forth, but it has been a matter of some dismay and bewilderment watching the chronicle of lamentable failure ever since. The twin principles which prevention of vertical transmission were meant to embody were universal access on the one hand and gender equality on the other, and both have been vetoed by what has happened – by the program itself.”

ITPC's seventh *Missing the Target* report presents on-the-ground research conducted by civil society activists in Argentina, Cambodia, Moldova, Morocco, Uganda and Zimbabwe. The report's researchers highlighted some of the key findings about the provision of prevention of vertical transmission in each of their countries.

"Women alone bear the weight of PMTCT and the result of a possible positive HIV test," said Othoman Mellouk, from Morocco.

"Many pregnant women, especially those who live in isolated or poor communities, visit a clinic for the first time late in their terms, and may not be tested for HIV or receive information about prevention of vertical transmission," said Lorena Di Giano, from Argentina.

"PMTCT is reaching only a handful of Cambodian women and their babies. Only about one in ten HIV-positive mothers and their babies receive antiretroviral drugs to prevent vertical transmission," said Kem Ley, from Cambodia.

"In Uganda, many HIV-positive mothers are forced by stigma, poverty or cultural pressures to practice risky mixed-feeding, rather than exclusive breast-feeding, which is safer for their babies," said Richard Hasunira, from Uganda.

"HIV-positive women in Moldova who disclose their status and seek treatment and care for themselves and their babies often face stigma and discrimination. They may also face discrimination and violence from their families," said Liudmila Untura, from Moldova.

"Many women in Zimbabwe lack the hard currency needed to pay transportation and hospital costs, so more and more of them are delivering their babies at home without expert health care and access to prevention of vertical transmission services," said Caroline Mubaira, from Zimbabwe.

The report, published by the Treatment Monitoring and Advocacy Project (TMAP) of ITPC, is based on research conducted in the six countries between November 2008 and January 2009. The full report is available at: www.aidstreatmentaccess.org and www.itpcglobal.org

About the International Treatment Preparedness Coalition: The International Treatment Preparedness Coalition (ITPC) is a worldwide coalition of people living with HIV and their supporters and advocates that uses a community-driven approach to achieve universal access to treatment, prevention, and all health care services for people living with HIV and those at-risk. The Treatment Monitoring & Advocacy Project (TMAP) of ITPC publishes the *Missing the Target* series that identifies barriers to delivery of AIDS services and holds national governments and global institutions accountable for improved efforts. All reports are available at: www.aidstreatmentaccess.org and www.itpcglobal.org

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