

UN summit adopts AIDS targets amid condom storm

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A UN summit on Friday ordered a huge expansion in AIDS treatment, but sparked protests by the Vatican and some Muslim nations over its endorsement of condoms and calls to help prostitutes, gays and drug users.

The three day summit for the 30th anniversary of the discovery of AIDS set the target of more than doubling the number of people on retroviral treatment to 15 million by 2015. It said mother-to-child AIDS transmissions should also be eliminated by then.

"We must win our battle against AIDS and we will," said Joseph Deiss, president of the UN General Assembly, after the declaration was agreed by consensus by UN members.

About 34 million people around the world have the disease, 1.8 million die from it each year and there are 7,000 new infections each day.

But UN countries committed "to accelerate efforts to achieve the goal of universal access" to retroviral treatment.

They aim to place 15 million HIV sufferers in the poorest countries on life-extending drugs by 2015. About 6.6 million people currently receive treatment, according to UN figures.

The accord also aims to end mother-to-child [HIV infection](#) by 2015 and increase [preventative measures](#) for the "most vulnerable populations."

Health groups welcomed the declaration, but said the international community must now commit the necessary funds to pay for the targets.

The summit did not make financial commitments. The United Nations estimates the international community will have to find six billion dollars a year to get the extra nine million sufferers onto retroviral treatment.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon welcomed the setting of "clear and measurable targets," a spokesman said. He called this "an absolute imperative if we are to succeed in realizing our vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths."

Britain's International Development Minister Stephen O'Brien said the reluctance to commit to firm figures did not mean the targets would not be met.

"Yes it is stretching, yes it is tough and yes it is going to be difficult, it will be a rocky road, but it's worth going for and we are not going to dilute the ambition," he said.

The final document makes the most explicit reference yet by a UN summit document to the use of condoms to prevent the spread of AIDS and also calls for greater help prostitutes, gays and drug users.

There was fierce debate about the wording in weeks of negotiations on the final document, with strong opposition from the Vatican and Muslim nations such as Iran, diplomats involved with the talks said.

Instead of talking simply about the importance of abstinence and fidelity, the statement stresses the "correct and consistent use of condoms."

"It is important to point out the reference to key populations in this

declaration such as men that have sex with men, sex workers, injecting drug users," said the Brazilian Health Minister Alexandre Padilha.

Padilha said the rights of transgenders, transvestites and prisoners also had to be defended.

The Vatican's delegate was jeered by activists in the General Assembly, when she opposed the mention of condoms and the "high risk" population sectors.

"They can give the impression that certain types of irresponsible behavior are morally acceptable. The Holy See does not endorse the use of condoms as part of HIV and AIDS prevention programs," said the delegate Jane Adolthe.

Iran's acting health minister, Mohammad Hossein Niknam, said his country would not be bound by summit references to "monoethical behaviors" which run counter to Islamic culture, the minister said.

Syria also complained about the support for vulnerable groups saying it should be left to individual countries to decide who to protect.

UN aids experts said the summit declaration would help them to overcome religious and social resistance to condoms which have been shown as one of the most effective ways of stopping the spread of [AIDS](#).

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