

International groups urge Francophone nations to fight AIDS

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About 50 non-governmental organisations on Friday urged the French-speaking nations holding a summit in Kinshasa at the weekend to "make concrete commitments" to fight AIDS in Africa.

"This 14th summit of the Francophonie (group of mainly former French colonies) should be an opportunity for governments of Francophone countries to make concrete commitments in the face of an epidemic that continues to devastate whole societies and undermine development," the NGOs wrote in an open joint letter.

They called on France, whose President Francois Hollande will attend the November 12-14 summit, to "allocate a substantial part of the tax on [financial transactions](#) to development issues, including the right to health and the struggle against HIV-AIDS."

As for "Francophone states described as developed", they should "increase their contributions to multilateral financial tools to finance programmes for universal access, like the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria," added the signatories, who included Medecins du Monde (Doctors of the World) and other international and African organisations.

Several states have reduced their donations to the Global Fund because of the [worldwide financial crisis](#), cutting resources available for buying anti-retroviral (ARV) drugs, which are essential for prolonging the lives of HIV-positive people.

In Africa, the number of people being treated has attained a record level of 6.2 million, or 56 percent of all Africans in need of ARVs.

In the summit host [Democratic Republic of Congo](#), in 2009, the rate of HIV-positive people was about three percent of the population and HIV affected more than one million people, out of a population of some 70 million.

More than 435,000 people in the DR Congo needed ARV treatment, but it was available to only 53,000, the organisations stated, stressing that the country was "not an isolated case in the Francophone group of states".

They called on French-speaking nations to "respect the commitment made" in 2001 at a summit in Abuja in Nigeria, when they agreed "to allocate at least 15 percent of national budgets to health and thus share the responsibility for the right to health".

This commitment is respected by Mauritius, Cape Verde, Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Rwanda, among other countries, according to the United Nations.

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