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Public health leaders push ambitious agenda to stop TB deaths among people living with HIV

22 July 2010 - Vienna, Austria - It's a story that unfolds every day around the world but is rarely heard. A woman, man or child living with HIV gets exposed to tuberculosis (TB) in a setting where there are no measures to stop the spread of infection. It could be a workplace, a prison, a clinic or even at home. Soon the person is sick - coughing, feverish and weak.

This story is being told and retold this week among the 20 000 participants gathered for the 2010 International AIDS Conference. It's a story that can end well if the person is lucky enough to have access to both antiretroviral and TB treatment. But too often there is a fatal finish. Without proper treatment about nine out of 10 people living with HIV who become ill with active TB will die within two to three months.

The dual epidemic has fanned across Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe and affects women, men and children from every walk of life. One in four deaths among people with HIV is linked to TB - that's about half a million people who die unnecessarily each year.

"Every three minutes a person living with HIV has his or her life cut off prematurely by TB. This is completely unacceptable, because TB is a preventable and curable disease," said Dr Jorge Sampaio, the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy to Stop TB.

Global public health leaders gathered at this conference have committed to an ambitious new agenda to stop these preventable deaths. Dr Sampaio presided today over the signing of a landmark document: a memorandum of understanding between the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the Stop TB Partnership. The agreement binds the two organizations together in a common goal: to strive towards halving the number of people living with HIV who die from TB by 2015, compared to 1994 levels. Provision of life-saving antiretroviral treatment for all TB patients living with HIV is another key objective.

"We already have the tools to keep people living with HIV from dying of TB ", said Mr Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS, "We must join our TB partners to promote an evidence and human rights based approach to tackling TB and HIV. Together we can virtually eliminate TB related AIDS deaths."

Stop TB and UNAIDS will press government health programmes to reach all people in need of care for TB/HIV by integrating the services that provide diagnosis and treatment for both conditions; and also seek to increase the resources needed to accomplish this goal. Another overarching objective is to galvanize civil society organizations, communities affected by TB and HIV and the private sector to form strong partnerships aimed at jointly addressing TB/HIV.

In keeping with the focus of this year's AIDS conference, the signers stressed the needs of marginalized groups. "We call on the world's leaders to promote full

access to HIV and TB services for women and girls, orphans, displaced persons, migrants, prisoners, men who have sex with men, people who use drugs other vulnerable groups," said Dr Marcos Espinal, Executive Secretary of the Stop TB Partnership.

During 2010 and 2011 the leadership of Stop TB and UNAIDS will make at least two joint visits to countries heavily affected by TB/HIV per year and promote their new initiative at least one international event per year.

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Note to editors

UNAIDS, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, is an innovative United Nations partnership that leads and inspires the world in achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. Learn more at unaids.org.

The Stop TB Partnership is a leading public-private global health partnership, established in 2001, with the aim of eliminating tuberculosis (TB), as a public health problem and, ultimately, to obtain a world free of TB. It comprises a network of more than 1200 international organizations, countries, donors from the public and private sectors, governmental and nongovernmental organizations and individuals that have expressed an interest in working together to achieve this goal. Find out more at www.stoptb.org.