

**Message from the President of France to the International AIDS
Conference convened by the International AIDS Society (IAS) in Mexico
City**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You have gathered in Mexico for a cause I feel strongly about. There is no more noble or more just fight than yours, which is fighting day after day to save the lives of millions of men, women and children afflicted with the scourge of AIDS. There is no more noble or more just cause than fighting for human rights and against all forms of discrimination against minorities, vulnerable people and all those rejected by society.

Today I wish to pay you a special homage and express my solemn support and the solidarity of the citizens of France and the European Union.

You know my commitment, and that of France, to your demand for public health. It is a deeply political demand and a deeply moral one.

Nothing can dissuade France from its lasting commitment to combating AIDS. France was and will be in the forefront of the fight against AIDS. France allocates \$1.4 billion a year to health in developing countries. France is the second-biggest contributor to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria behind the United States, and the leading G8 donor per capita. France is also the number-one contributor to Unitaid, which is now one of the biggest purchasers of antiretrovirals worldwide. Our bilateral action is every bit as dynamic.

In AIDS research, our National AIDS and Hepatitis Research Agency (ANRS), Research Institute for Development (IRD) and Pasteur Institute put France at the global cutting edge. I undertake to maintain that level of excellence.

Supporting research in the countries of the South is a priority focus for the ANRS. It devotes more than one-quarter of its budget, namely \$18 million, per year to research in countries of the South.

France was one of the first countries to promote the goal of universal access to prevention, treatment and care. At the time we were told that was unreasonable. But ten years on, we have convinced our partners to raise unprecedented amounts and treat more than 3 million patients in the South, of which 2 million in Africa, a continent which I consider to be the priority of priorities in health.

That achievement falls far short of needs, I know. We must go much further and faster. That is my firm belief. On several occasions, the international community has made very clear, very strong commitments in this regard. It must honour those commitments. I undertake to ensure that France honours hers. And I will urge other nations to scrupulously fulfil their pledges. In particular, I would like to see the G8 members report annually on progress in delivering on their pledges. I would also like the next United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS, in two years' time, to take place at the level of Heads of State and Government.

France has managed to respond effectively to the epidemic by working pragmatically and proactively with marginalised communities and groups. The share of drug users in new infections in France has fallen from 30% to under 2%. I call on the States that have not yet implemented this type of policy to do so without delay.

It is my firm belief that the fight against AIDS and for health is not just a matter for doctors and experts. It is a matter for all of us, and first and foremost for people living with HIV/AIDS.

Their freedom of movement is therefore a fundamental right. The restrictions that apply to them in many countries have no grounds in public health and are – I say it clearly – quite simply unacceptable. That is why I wanted France to push to include this item on the G8 agenda for the first time. I undertake to keep up the pressure on my G8 counterparts, and beyond this group of Heads of State, to turn words into action over the next few months. I also solemnly undertake to combat the criminalisation of the behaviour of high-risk groups and certain minorities that occurs in too many countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You can count on France and the European Union to be by your side in the determined fight against AIDS in the months and years to come. In order to do so, we must help strengthen health systems, in particular through support for human resources, which are cruelly lacking. That is crucial to enabling universal access to treatment in developing countries.

Nicolas Sarkozy