PRESS RELEASE
For Immediate Release

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon invokes the memory of Madiba and calls for Universal Access to Medicines at International Aids Conference

DURBAN—The United Nations Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Access to Medicines convened a press briefing on Nelson Mandela International Day. On the sidelines of the 21st International AIDS Conference, being held in Durban, treatment activists requested the release of the Panel’s much anticipated recommendations. Inside the briefing, the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon underscored his commitment to the process and recounted the underlying reasons why he established the Panel to promote innovation and increase access to medicines, vaccines and diagnostics.

“Sixteen years ago, when the AIDS conference was last held in Durban, less than 1 percent of all people living with HIV in poorer countries had access to treatment. Millions died waiting for medicines. Today, more than 17 million people receive treatment,” said United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. “If we want to reach the universal health coverage by 2030, we have to break down barriers to treatment. And we need to develop treatments for tuberculosis, neglected tropical diseases and other unmet needs.”

The High-Level Panel was convened in November 2015, following the adoption of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, to address the policy incoherence between the justifiable rights of inventors, international human rights law, trade rules and public health in the context of health technologies.

“At present, the world is struggling to respond effectively to challenges like antimicrobial resistance, tuberculosis, diseases of the poor and rare diseases because there is not a clear immediate return on investment,” said Ruth Dreifuss. “The Panel is looking at how to ensure that innovation is sufficiently rewarded, while also making progress towards universal health coverage by increasing access to health technologies.”

To take into account expert contributions from all stakeholders, the Panel issued a call for contributions in December 2015 and subsequently received 182 submissions from the private sector government, civil society groups, multilateral organizations and academia. In March 2016, the Panel held two global dialogues – in London and Johannesburg – where participants
from around the world gathered in person and online to discuss and propose solutions to the challenges of promoting innovation and access to medicines, vaccines and diagnostics.

“The history of South Africa should inspire us, and remind us that there are many ways to encourage more innovation where it is needed and make progress on the issue of access to medicines,” said Malebona Precious Matsoso, High-Level Panel Member and Director-General, Department of Health, South Africa. “I hope the report contains many routes of action that we can take immediately and build toward the future.”

The briefing follows eight months of intensive collaboration by the panel, which is comprised of members from industry, government, civil society and academia. The Panel is now finalizing its report before presenting it to the UN Secretary-General.

“We hope this report helps to develop new pathways to innovation and access to health technologies,” said Mandeep Dhaliwal, Director of Health and HIV at the United Nations Development Programme. “This Panel has an important mandate and we’re thankful to all panel members and contributors who have participated and contributed their ideas and proposals to move this issue forward.”

The Durban AIDS conference will see approximately 18,000 participants come together to mark the progress made in tackling HIV since the game changing conference held at the same venue 16 years ago. It will also look at the challenges that still need to be overcome when tackling HIV and co-infections such as tuberculosis and hepatitis limited research and development and growing drug resistance.

“Millions of people died unnecessary in South Africa and across the world because HIV and AIDS drugs weren’t available to those that needed them. In Durban sixteen years ago, treatment activists told the world know that everyone with HIV and AIDS had a right to treatment,” said Lorena Di Giano, Member of the High-Level Panel’s Expert Advisory Group and General Coordinator of the Latin American Network for Access to Medicines. “Despite progress on HIV and AIDS, we must relook at a system that doesn’t produce the innovation needed to tackle ancient diseases like tuberculosis or indeed ensure health technologies are reaching those that need them most.

**Note to the Editor**

The United Nations Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Access to Medicines comprises of 16 eminent, well-respected individuals with a deep knowledge and understanding of the broad range of legal, trade, public health and human rights issues associated with innovation and access to medicines and health technologies. Biographies and additional information on the High-Level Panel can be accessed from [www.UNSGaccessmeds.org](http://www.UNSGaccessmeds.org).

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