

Advocacy Guide

to the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS

*United Nations General Assembly
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Prepared by the
**International Council of AIDS Service Organizations
(ICASO)**

Advocacy Guide to the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS

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How to Obtain Copies:

Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS

Electronic copies of the Declaration are available through the UNAIDS web site:

www.unaids.org/UNGASS/index.html

Hard copies are available through *UNAIDS Country Program Advisors* who are the *UN Focal Points* at country level.

Advocacy Guide to the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS

Additional hard copies of this Advocacy Guide can be obtained in English, French and Spanish from ICASO Central Secretariat.

Electronic copies can be downloaded from:

www.icaso.org/ungass/advocacyeng.pdf (English)

www.icaso.org/ungass/advocacyesp.pdf (Spanish)

www.icaso.org/ungass/advocacyfra.pdf (French)

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ICASO is the international network for community-based AIDS organizations (CBOs) whose mandate is to promote and support the work of CBOs around the world in the prevention of AIDS and care and treatment for people living with HIV/AIDS, with particular emphasis on strengthening the response in communities with fewer resources and within affected communities.

ICASO's recognition and respect for the human rights of all persons is central to an intelligent public health strategy to combat the AIDS epidemic.

The ICASO network is an interactive global focus point in the international HIV/AIDS world, gathering and disseminating information and analysis on key issues, coordinating the development of CBO/NGO positions on these issues, and working as partners with key international agencies to ensure that the concerns and interests of CBOs and NGOs around the world are articulated and represented at all levels.

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Introduction

The Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, adopted unanimously by the member states of the United Nations in June 2001, is an historic document. It will serve as a road map for the global response to HIV/AIDS for the next decade. ICASO has prepared this Advocacy Guide to assist NGOs in using the Declaration to enhance the response to HIV/AIDS.

Background

History of the Declaration of Commitment

The Declaration of Commitment was adopted unanimously by the member states of the United Nations on June 27, 2001 in New York City, at the conclusion of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on HIV/AIDS. The Special Session was created by a resolution of the General Assembly adopted on November 3, 2000. Special sessions usually take years to organize, but the one on HIV/AIDS was done in just eight months, a fact that underscores the urgency of this issue.

During the months preceding the Special Session, state delegations held several informal consultation meetings to discuss drafts of the Declaration of Commitment. Interested members of civil society had several opportunities to present their views to member states at these consultation meetings. NGOs were also able to provide input by submitting written briefs, by lobbying state delegations, and by participating directly on a number of UNGASS state delegations.

Importance of the Declaration of Commitment

The Declaration of Commitment is a resolution of the General Assembly. It does not have the same force as a treaty or convention that is formally ratified by individual member states. But it is a statement of intent, a plan that governments say they are going to follow.

The Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS is an important document. It sets real targets for prevention, funding and accessing essential medicines, among other things. The governments of the world have made an unprecedented commitment. They have issued a collective statement detailing a strategy for addressing HIV/AIDS, a strategy with clear goals and timelines. They have produced a blueprint that civil society can use to promote further action on AIDS as well as hold governments accountable. The Declaration of Commitment is the new benchmark against which we measure progress. Governments cannot be allowed to backtrack from what is set out in the Declaration.

There are two areas (in particular) where the Declaration could have gone further. The Declaration does not name the groups that are vulnerable to HIV infection, and it does not reference the International Guidelines on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights. But, overall, it is a very strong statement.

The Declaration of Commitment will not displace the work we are doing on the frontlines. But we can use the Declaration to mobilize governments and international agencies to invest more resources into this work.

Finally, it is not enough to say that governments are responsible for implementing the Declaration of Commitment. Civil society must also participate in this process. We should say to governments that we will share in the ownership of this document providing they involve civil society in a meaningful way in the development and implementation of action plans that will bring life to the commitments contained in the Declaration.

How to Use the Declaration of Commitment To Enhance the Response to HIV/AIDS

This section contains recommended strategies that can be pursued at the national and at regional levels. Not all NGOs will be able to pursue all of the strategies listed here. NGOs should select the strategies that work for them.

National Strategies

1. Disseminate the Declaration of Commitment widely to organizations and people working in HIV/AIDS.

By voting to adopt the Declaration of Commitment, your government has promised to meet a large number of targets and to follow through on a series of commitments. We need to disseminate the Declaration as widely as possible so that people are aware of what these targets and commitments are. The following is a partial list of who should receive copies of the Declaration:

- NGOs
- human rights and development organizations
- health care professionals, researchers, academics
- politicians and government officials
- media

NGOs should receive multiple copies. See the box at the beginning of this document for information on how to obtain copies of the Declaration of Commitment.

2. Disseminate this Advocacy Guide widely to organizations and people working in HIV/AIDS.

The Advocacy Guide is a tool that will help NGOs use the Declaration of Commitment effectively.

3. Analyze the Declaration of Commitment and Establish Priorities

There are over 50 targets and commitments in the Declaration. You will need to decide which ones you want to concentrate on when you pressure your government to take action (see the next strategy). Initially, at least, you will need to be selective. Eventually, you may be able to address all of them.

You may want to consider focusing on the commitments around leadership. One of the reasons why the Declaration is so important is that governments have acknowledged the need for better leadership on HIV/AIDS. If you decide to concentrate on leadership, you should obtain and disseminate copies of *The Global Strategy Framework on HIV/AIDS*. This UNAIDS document, adopted in December 2000, has guided the UN's response to the epidemic. It has a strong section on leadership. Copies in English, French, Spanish and Russian (in PDF format) can be downloaded from the UNGASS website at <<http://www.un.org/ga/aids>>. Click on "Documents."

Here are a few examples of other commitments that you may want to include on your priority list:

- ✓ Establish monitoring systems for the promotion and protection of the human rights of people living with HIV/AIDS.
- ✓ Enact legislation, regulations and other measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS and members of vulnerable groups.
- ✓ Reduce HIV prevalence among young people by 25%.
- ✓ Develop national strategies to strengthen health care systems and address factors affecting the provision of HIV drugs (including cost).
- ✓ Develop national strategies to build and strengthen capacities to promote a supportive environment for orphans, boys and girls affected by HIV/AIDS.
- ✓ Ensure that at least 90% of young people have access to the information, education and services necessary to develop the life skills they need to reduce their vulnerability to HIV infection.

You could organize a meeting of NGOs in your city, region or country to discuss the Declaration in detail, its targets, what they mean, etc. You could also consider calling for a meeting between NGOs and government officials to discuss how the commitments can be incorporated in a national AIDS strategy. It would be useful to include those NGOs who may have participated in the UNGASS event in New York to provide a background to your group.

4. *Hold your government accountable for following through on the commitments it made in the Declaration of Commitment and at UNGASS.*

The Declaration and the statements made by your government at UNGASS are tools that you can use to encourage and/or pressure your government to do more to respond to the epidemic. Here are some suggested actions:

- **Develop and implement lobby and advocacy plans.** For example, you could:
 - Ask your government how it plans to reach the targets set out in the Declaration and to implement the other commitments contained in the document. Tell your government what you think the priority commitments are. Call for the development of a specific action plan with timelines.
 - Press your government to review and modify its National AIDS Strategy (or other plans) to reflect the commitments in the Declaration.

- Ask your government how it plans to monitor the implementation of the targets and commitments in the Declaration.
 - Lobby your government to allocate more resources to the response to HIV/AIDS.
 - Press your government to develop strategies to better mobilize and coordinate international assistance.
 - Lobby your government to allocate the bulk of any new funding to the work being done by community-based organizations.
 - Encourage your government to undertake an assessment of the capacity of national institutions to lead a large-scale and multi-sectoral response to the epidemic.
- **Organize meetings with other HIV/AIDS NGOs** in your country to develop a common approach for your lobby and advocacy effort and to exchange information about your respective lobby and advocacy activities.
 - **Approach other individuals working in HIV/AIDS** health care professionals, researchers, academics, etc. and ask them to support your lobby and advocacy efforts.
 - **Enlist the support for the United Nations Theme Groups on HIV/AIDS** in your country. The purpose of the theme groups is to support the national response to HIV/AIDS by ensuring coordination among the UN agencies involved in HIV/AIDS work. Up to now, the UN Theme Groups have worked well with NGOs in some countries, but not in others. In those countries where there has not been much collaboration, lobby for the UN Theme Groups to work more closely with NGOs. And, encourage the UN Theme Groups to modify their own workplans to ensure consistency with the Declaration of Commitment.
 - **Obtain copies of the speeches made by the representatives of your government** at the General Assembly and at other UNGASS sessions. In these statements, some countries went beyond what is in the Declaration; other countries did not go as far. In either case, you can use these statements as an advocacy tool. You should be able to get copies of these speeches from the people working on HIV/AIDS in your health ministry, or from officials in your foreign ministry.

As you are developing your lobby and advocacy plan, you will need to take into account factors such as: (a) whether your government has a good track record in responding to HIV/AIDS; (b) what the nature of the epidemic is in your country; (c) what resources are available to your government and to your organization; (d) whether there is a history of government-NGO collaboration in your country and whether your government is receptive to working with NGOs; and (e) who the key people are in government whom you should be approaching. In some instances, it may be important to first hold a meeting with government officials to let them know that the NGO community is willing and ready to work with them to implement the Declaration. In other instances where you have a good working relationship, you can begin developing and implementing a more articulated lobby and advocacy plan with your own targets for moving the agenda forward.

5. *Lobby to be part of the process.*

In addition to calling on your government to follow through on the commitments in the Declaration, you should be requesting and/or insisting that NGOs be involved in the development of any action plans. The Declaration itself says that the full participation of persons living with HIV/AIDS, young people and civil society actors in the design, planning, implementation and evaluation of programmes is crucial to the development of an effective response to the epidemic.

6. *Decide whether your organization will endorse the Declaration of Commitment.*

Review the Declaration and determine whether your organization will formally endorse it. If your organization does endorse the Declaration, this may enhance your advocacy efforts and your partnership with government. It would be a further signal to your government that civil society wants to participate with government in the implementation of the Declaration.

7. *Develop and strengthen partnerships with organizations and individuals outside the HIV/AIDS NGO community.*

To be successful, efforts to get governments to follow through on the Declaration of Commitment must involve not only people and organizations working in HIV/AIDS, but also organizations that focus on issues of human rights, development, health, labour and social action. Approach other NGOs and discuss with them how you can work together to see that the Declaration is implemented in your country. Build coalitions.

NGOs in Developed Countries

NGOs in countries with greater resources should focus on how to get their countries to show more leadership and commitment in the global response to the epidemic. One way of doing this is to pressure governments to increase official development assistance. The Declaration calls for countries to move towards a development assistance target of 0.7% of gross national product.

UN Guidance Note on HIV/AIDS

UNAIDS has prepared a Guidance Note on how UN agencies can assist national governments to implement the commitments contained in the Declaration of Commitment. The Guidance Note was sent to UN Resident Coordinators in September 2001. The Resident coordinator is the top UN official in each country. The Guidance Note presents an analysis of what makes the Declaration of Commitment unique and important; outlines the principles that should guide the support of the UN system for the implementation of the Declaration; and provides a list of suggested actions that UN officials can undertake. The Guidance Note underscores the commitment of UNAIDS and the UN system to ensuring that the Declaration of Commitment is used effectively to enhance the response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The Guidance Note is a public document. You should be able to obtain a copy from the UN Resident Coordinator or other UN officials in your country.

8. Strengthen the working relationship with your government.

In countries where NGO representatives were part of the UNGASS delegations, work to ensure that the process continues – in other words, keep developing the partnership. In other countries, wherever possible, take steps to initiate this kind of partnership with your government. NGOs throughout the world all have different relationships – sometimes cooperative and sometimes not. Determine what works best within the context of your political process and aim to improve this relationship if possible. Remind them, if necessary, that you are there to assist them to implement programs and policies that can help them meet their targets.

9. Develop strategies to monitor implementation of the Declaration of the Commitment in your country.

Civil society needs to monitor the implementation of the targets and commitments contained in the Declaration. This is a significant task. Discuss with other NGOs in your country how best to do this. You may decide that you need to obtain additional resources to make this happen. The need for monitoring is also addressed in *Regional Strategies* on page 9 and in the section on *Other Issues and Next Steps*.

Vulnerable Groups

Although the list of groups that are vulnerable to HIV infection was not included in the final text of the Declaration of Commitment, we should take every opportunity to name them to ensure that strategies are developed to address their needs. The vulnerable groups include:

- Children
- women
- men who have sex with men
- sex workers and their clients
- injection drug users and their sexual partners
- indigenous populations
- prisoners
- refugees and mobile populations

Regional Strategies

1. Follow up on the regional commitments in the Declaration.

Regional HIV/AIDS NGOs should analyze the Declaration and identify commitments that they want to address. The Declaration contains specific regional commitments in two of its sections Leadership and Follow-Up.

2. Assist national NGOs in their efforts to implement the Declaration of Commitment.

Regional and sub-regional networks of AIDS service organizations and people living with HIV/AIDS should develop strategies to support the work being done at the national level. They should consult NGOs in the region to obtain their input on how the regional and sub-regional networks can best contribute.

3. Lobby for the inclusion of sessions on the Declaration of Commitment at regional and sub-regional HIV/AIDS conferences and at regional meetings of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

These sessions could include (a) discussions on next steps for implementing the Declaration; and (b) skills building sessions on how to lobby governments with respect to the Declaration. You may want to apply for ECOSOC status. To find out more, please see the box on page 12.

4. Lobby for the inclusion of sessions on HIV/AIDS in general, and the Declaration of Commitment in particular, at appropriate non-HIV/AIDS conferences in the region.

This could include conferences on women, human rights, racism and trade union issues.

5. Develop and strengthen partnerships with regional non-HIV/AIDS coalitions, networks and organizations.

Because of the broad scope of the commitments contained in the Declaration, there are regional coalitions, networks and organizations working in various fields that will be interested in working with HIV/AIDS organizations to see that the Declaration is implemented.

6. Share experiences, success stories and lessons learned.

As we gain more experience working at country level to implement the Declaration, we need to share our experiences and learn from our successes and failures.

7. Develop strategies to monitor implementation of the Declaration of Commitment in your region.

Regional HIV/AIDS organizations should be monitoring the implementation of the regional commitments in the Declaration, and also determining how best they can assist national NGOs to carry out the in-country monitoring required. See also *Other Issues and Next Steps* on page 11.

International Guidelines on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights

When the draft text of the Declaration of Commitment was being negotiated, there were long discussions about whether the International Guidelines on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights would be formally acknowledged. Unfortunately, there was no reference to the Guidelines in the final text. Some countries said that the Guidelines could not be included because it was not a United Nations document. Although the United Nations sponsored the process by which the Guidelines were developed, the Guidelines have never been formally adopted by any U.N. body or agency. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the U.N. Commission on Human Rights has asked all member states to report on their progress in promoting and implementing the Guidelines.

Copies of the International Guidelines in English, French, Spanish, Russian and Arabic can be downloaded from the website of UNAIDS at <<http://www.unaids.org>>. Click on "Publications," "Documents organized by subject," and then "Human rights, ethics and law." Please note: ICASO has produced two documents related to these guidelines: *An Advocate's Guide to the International Guidelines on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights*, and an *NGO Summary of the International Guidelines on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights*. Copies of these documents can be downloaded in English, French and Spanish from the ICASO website at <<http://www.icaso.org>>.

Other Issues and Next Steps

Next General Assembly Session

The General Assembly will conduct annual reviews (of at least one day duration) on progress made in implementing the Declaration. ICASO will develop strategies over the coming months on how civil society can best participate in these reviews.

Monitoring the Implementation of the Declaration

In the months ahead, there will be considerable discussion among NGOs at regional conferences and elsewhere on how to monitor the implementation of the commitments in the Declaration. Should we be calling for the establishment of a formal civil society monitoring body? (This was one idea advanced at the NGO sessions at UNGASS). What kind of monitoring system do we need at the global level? At the regional level? How can NGOs working at the global and regional levels best support the monitoring that needs to happen in your country? How will achievement of the targets in the Declaration be monitored? Are the existing surveillance systems adequate or will new systems need to be developed? If new systems are needed, what actions should be pursued at the global and regional level to make that happen?

We expect that UNAIDS will be developing a monitoring strategy and announcing the details of this strategy during the next few months. Civil society will need to determine how it can work with the UNAIDS strategy and what else it will need to do with respect to monitoring.

Monitoring: Key Dates

As we develop monitoring strategies, we should keep in mind that most of the time-specific commitments in the Declaration are assigned one of three key dates:

- 2003 is the date when many strategies and plans are to be developed;
- 2005 is the date when these strategies and plans should be implemented, or at least when implementation should be well underway; and
- 2010 is the date by which we should be able to measure significant impact.

Regional and Global Conferences

There will be opportunities at regional and global conferences to continue our discussions on the Declaration of Commitment, on the monitoring process, and on the annual review of the Declaration at the General Assembly. These conferences will also provide NGOs with an opportunity to share experiences and lessons learned with respect to the Declaration.

What will ICASO do?

As a key facilitator in the preparatory process for the UNGASS on HIV/AIDS, ICASO plans to continue investing energy and resources into the follow-up. This NGO Advocacy Guide is one example. ICASO is also planning other activities to ensure that NGOs and other civil society organizations remain updated on developments related to the implementation of the Declaration of Commitment.

Here are just a few examples of what ICASO plans to do:

- Ensure on-going liaison with UNAIDS on their plans to provide guidance on monitoring mechanisms at country level;
- Disseminate periodic updates on the status of the Global AIDS and Health Fund and other activities related to meeting the targets set out in the Declaration;
- Host information sessions on the progress achieved in implementing the Declaration and the Global AIDS and Health Fund at various international conferences (regional and global);
- Undertake research in selected countries on progress achieved;
- Provide analysis and replies to the annual report on the implementation of the Declaration by the UN Secretary General.

ICASO will continue to collect and disseminate information related to our activities and those of others in the months ahead. Feel free to contact us for any further information on our activities.

Get More Involved in U.N. Affairs

The UNGASS experience has revealed the importance of understanding the processes and politics of the United Nations. In addition to the planned annual reviews of the Declaration in the General Assembly, HIV/AIDS issues are being discussed by a number of other U.N. bodies, such as the Commission on Human Rights, the Commission on the Status of Women, and the Commission on the Rights of the Child. HIV/AIDS issues are also discussed at UN-sponsored conferences (e.g., the World Assembly on Ageing, the World Conference on Financing for Development) and at other Special Sessions, such as the UNGASS on Children. NGOs should consider obtaining ECOSOC status so that they can participate actively in various U.N. meetings. To find out more about applying for ECOSOC status, contact Leslie Wright at the Conference of NGOs (CONGO):

Telephone (1-212) 986-8557, Email <congongo@aol.com>.



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