Combating HIV/AIDS within the European Union and in the neighbouring countries, 2006-2009

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The Council and the representatives of the Member States adopted the conclusions on recent issues highlighted concerning HIV/AIDS.

Highlighting the important role the European Union plays in confronting HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, the Council welcomes the Presidency Paper on “Recently Emerging Issues regarding HIV /AIDS” that focuses on newly emerging issues and barriers that hinder progress in tackling HIV/AIDS and the effective implementation of the European Programme of Action. The Council recognises that the fight against HIV/AIDS can only be successful if a comprehensive approach is taken that includes scaling up significantly towards the goal of universal access to prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010.

Whilst these Conclusions focus on the recent trend of feminisation, the Council emphasises the need to also focus on young people, especially young women and girls, children infected with and affected by HIV /AIDS, including children orphaned by AIDS and children and infants in need of treatment, women and girls in conflict situations as well as other key populations at particular risk of HIV infection, including men who have sex with men, injecting drug users, sex workers, prison populations, migrants, refugees, trafficking victims and others and to support their inclusion in the planning of strategies and programmes as well as in the decision making process in order to tackle HIV/AIDS successfully.

The Council asks the Commission and the Member States to:

- support the adoption and strengthening of legal, policy and administrative measures at country level to promote and fully protect women's and girls’ rights and reduce their vulnerability to HIV /AIDS through the elimination of all forms of violence, stigma and discrimination as well as all kind of sexual exploitation of women, girls and boys including for commercial reasons;

- promote and support the enactment and enforcement of legislation in order to uphold and fully protect women’s rights;

- confront gender based violence, including female genital mutilation and other harmful traditional and customary practices, through political dialogue at country level and identify and develop social protection mechanisms that benefit households affected by HIV/AIDS and relieve the burden of care for women;

- promote and support increased participation of women where AIDS policies are formulated, agreed and implemented, and funds are allocated, with targets that can be measured and for which there is accountability;

- promote and support the inclusion of the issue of feminisation of HIV/AIDS in education programmes in order to raise awareness among girls and boys as well as young women and men of the threat posed by the pandemic;

- strengthen women’s organisations to play an active role in developing and implementing such policies;

- reaffirm their commitment to prevention and to focus on aspects of prevention such as sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR), harm reduction and preventing mother to child transmission (PMTCT), including through actions that support the reversing of the downward trend in financing for SRHR;

- support programmes that work with men and women to address gender and behaviour norms and norms around sexual relations that make women vulnerable to HIV/AIDS infection;

- promote the collection, analysis and use of age and sex-disaggregated data and their inclusion in reporting;

- promote strategies that ensure that HIV/AIDS and SRHR programmes contribute to the overall strengthening and sustainability of health systems including funding and implementation of the European Programme for Action to tackle the critical shortage of health workers in developing countries for the time period 2007-2013;

- promote universal access to sexual and reproductive health services and rights and commodities, including male and female condoms as the most efficient means to reduce the sexual transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, and to join efforts and explore ways to fill the commodities gap in this regard;

- promote the greater involvement of potential beneficiaries, including people living with HIV, women and youth groups in the design, programming and implementation of SRHR programmes and HIV/AIDS initiatives;

- ensure that SRHR and HIV/AIDS policies, programmes and services are built on the fundamental commitment to respect, protect and promote human rights;

- promote linkages between HIV/AIDS and SRHR within all existing national development plans and budgets, including health sector reforms, PRSPs as well as sector wide approaches and ensure that the linkages are addressed within EC instruments;

- work with existing organisations that currently support microbicide research;

- sponsor an EU or international Conference at the expert level with a wide group of stakeholders including representatives of the WHO, the European Medicines Agency (EMEA), civil society, including the International Partnership for Microbicides and the Association for Microbicide Development, regulatory authorities from developing countries and the pharmaceutical industry, on expanding HIV/AIDS preventive options;

- address as a priority the vulnerability of children affected by and living with HIV/AIDS, providing support to them and their families and caregivers, women and the elderly;

- provide support to awareness campaigns on linkages between HIV/AIDS and education;

- support developing countries in developing and improving formal strategies for an education sector response to HIV/AIDS;

- support the strengthening of social and legal protection systems as well as the creation of less susceptible livelihoods as an integral part of PRSPs in order to support households caring for orphans and vulnerable children as well as child headed households;

- support comprehensive education programmes which address HIV/AIDS Systematically;

- foster the sharing of information and best practices in sectoral approaches to HIV/AIDS;

- support capacity building programmes in the education sector.

The Council emphasises the importance of achieving sufficient, long-term, predictable, sustainable and increased funding to tackle HIV/AIDS in order to build-up and strengthen health and other social services, including basic health services, and to intensify research and development of new, improved and affordable tools of prevention, treatment and early diagnostics, including vaccines, paediatric drugs and microbicides. In this respect, the EU will continue working in the area of HIV/AIDS through a wide array of existing financing instruments at global and country level including the Global Fund to Fight HIV /AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM). The EU will collectively maintain and increase funding to the GFATM.

Lastly, the Council encourages the Commission and Member States to ensure implementation of existing commitments within the EU Programme for Action on HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis and calls on the Commission and Member States to report on progress, including on these emerging issues regarding HIV/AIDS, in the context of the joint monitoring and reporting on the European Programme for Action in 2008 and 2010.