Mr. President,

Let me begin by thanking you for convening this plenary meeting on the implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS. I would also like to thank the Secretary General for his report on this important issue. We have taken note of the various recommendations which are contained in the report.

This report provides us with a good overview of the global HIV/AIDS scene prior to next year’s comprehensive review of the achievements of 2001 Declaration of Commitment as well as 2006 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS.

At the outset, let me extend my support to the draft decision which you have put before us under this agenda item. We look forward to the consultations which will be held later this year to discuss the modalities and organizational arrangements for the next year’s comprehensive review of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS.

Mr President,

In 2001 and later in 2006, we embarked upon an ambitious task of achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010. This, along with the target set forth in MDG 6, namely, halting and reversing the spread of
HIV/AIDS epidemic by 2015, acted as the guiding principles in our joint efforts to combat this pandemic. While some progress has been made, however, targets still appear quite far.

Moreover, this year, we will also be reviewing the progress made in all the MDGs in September at the High-level Plenary meeting of the General Assembly. This will give us yet another opportunity to reaffirm our political will and commitment to reach the goals we have set forth ourselves.

Mr President,

The SG’s report points to mixed progress in the fight against HIV/AIDS, worldwide. On the positive side, as of December 2008, four million people in low and middle income countries were receiving anti-retroviral therapy – 10 times more than that of five years ago – and new HIV infections decreased by 17% between 2001 and 2008.

However, on the other hand, it can be seen that the epidemic continues to outpace the HIV response; and for every two people starting antiretroviral therapy, five are getting newly infected. Unfortunately, the HIV pandemic continues to remain one of the leading causes of death among reproductive age women worldwide.

Mr. President,

In India, in terms of prevalence, adult HIV rate is as low as 0.36%, nonetheless, in absolute terms, it is estimated that the HIV positive population is around 2.46 million. The primary objective of our national programme to combat HIV/AIDS, i.e., the National AIDS Control Programme, is in line with MDG 6 of halting and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS epidemic by 2015.

One of the important feature of this programme is to scale up its efforts through Targeted Interventions for High Risk Groups, strategizing comprehensive Information, Education and Communication packages for specific segments, and scaling up of the service delivery component.

Mr. President,

For us, the fight against HIV/AIDS has socio-economic and developmental dimensions, not merely a public health dimension. We have also mainstreamed HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment in all government schemes and activities and have actively involved corporate sector, NGOs and other stakeholders as a partner, towards this end. The need for a holistic approach that includes effective prevention strategies and access to low-cost affordable treatment for all cannot be overemphasized, for the effective combat of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Having realized that political
commitment is of paramount importance to combat HIV/AIDS, our National Council on AIDS is chaired by the Prime Minister and the State Councils by the respective Chief Ministers.

Mr President,

There is a need for greater cooperation and coordination at international level to fight this challenge in a concerted manner. India has also been at the forefront of global efforts on AIDS research and has been working in collaboration with the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative in this regard.

One of the major obstacles in the achievement of universal treatment is the high cost of anti-retroviral drugs. Indian pharmaceutical industry has been filling this critical gap by reducing the costs of these life saving generic drugs by producing high quality affordable drugs for its use in India and also in other developing countries. These efforts need to be fully recognized and supported by the international community. This has become all the more critical as universal access to anti retroviral treatment become mainstreamed in public health policies of governments. Further, availability of second generation anti retroviral drugs will not have any meaningful impact, if low cost generic versions are not made available in the market.

Mr. President,

Fight against HIV/AIDS is one of the keys to achieving the MDGs by 2015. We have come a long way since we committed ourselves to goals related to the HIV/AIDS pandemic but the task at hand continues to remain difficult and formidable. Let me reiterate our full commitment to effectively control HIV/AIDS pandemic in a comprehensive, multi-pronged and multi-sectoral manner, both nationally and internationally.

Thank you, Mr President

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