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Brazilian response to the HIV/ AIDS epidemic, 2001-2005

The document from the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on HIV/AIDS forms a fundamental reference point for everyone working in this field. It encompasses a wide variety of perspectives, from the formulation of public policies within the national, continental and global spheres to the provision of clinical care and implementation of preventive strategies by governments and civil society, and last but not least it relates to continuing dialogue with community leaders and the people who are living with HIV and AIDS.

Thanks to an initiative coordinated by the Brazilian Institute of Health, with support from the non-governmental organizations Gestos-PE and Gapa-SP, the Ford Foundation and the National STD/AIDS Program of the Ministry of Health, it was possible to quickly bring together a variety of researchers, activists and managers of public programs for the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS, for a meeting on November 21 and 22, 2005, at the State of São Paulo Department of Health, in the city of São Paulo.

Given the importance of the topic and the quality of the contributions from the different authors, it was decided to publish the communications presented: not in their original format, which was very preliminary, but fully incorporating the critiques and ideas arising from the discussions that followed the presentation of each text at the time of holding the seminar. It was decided, in our view correctly, to review each contribution in detail, starting by designating editors who would be in charge of three thematic blocks related to their respective fields of activity.

The publication resulting from this is the present supplement of the *Revista de Saúde Pública*. It consists of a compilation and analysis of essential data from the Brazilian response to the epidemic, in consonance with the UNGASS targets that are consolidated in the document "Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS".

Editing the present supplement in step with the agenda of the United Nations has proven to be a veritable challenge, as a consequence both of the urgency of disseminating the information and analyses in accordance with the scheduling of a new Assembly, to be held between May 30 and June 2, 2006, and the extent and complexity of the Brazilian response to the epidemic, which is considered to be a model at the international level.

It must be emphasized here that the authors have not only discussed topics that are central to the national and international agenda regarding HIV/AIDS, but also have had to deal with the many subtle interrelationships between this agenda and other public policies and their wide-ranging cultural, scientific and community interfaces. By way of example: protection of children and orphans, respect for and promotion of human rights, and transversal topics such as the dialogue between preventive education regarding HIV/AIDS and general education, HIV/AIDS research in the light of national and international dynamics in science, technology and innovation, and the friction relating to intellectual property in the context of pandemics with a dramatic impact on societies and particularly vulnerable segments of the population.

The targets that guided the editing of this supplement have, in our view, been satisfactorily

fulfilled, as a result of the authors' dedication and also their relevant accumulated experience, in the form of recollections from different institutions and a variety of initiatives from civil society, as well as communications in congresses, seminars and scientific publications over the two and a half decades of continual Brazilian response to the epidemic. Even though emphasizing the period between UNGASS and the meeting in São Paulo (2001-2005), the articles invariably deal with long-duration trends and experiences accumulated over the last 25 years. This also results from the fact that Brazil had already fulfilled several of the UNGASS targets even before they were formulated in 2001. Likewise, some topics in the UNGASS declaration fortunately do not relate to Brazil, even though they form a daily challenge for very many communities and countries that are racked by conflict and revolt, if not civil war.

We conclude this editorial by inviting readers to share in the rich Brazilian experience that has been systematized in the articles compiled here, without their critical appraisal dimmed by naively triumphalistic proposals. The HIV and AIDS epidemic is the greatest epidemic in the whole history of humanity and, faced with this immense challenge, there is no room for inertia, indifference or arrogance. The observation that much has already been achieved should, rather, serve as a stimulus for much more to be done, leading towards a world in which suffering can be mitigated and the gap between those who have resources and those who have nothing can be overcome, for the benefit of everyone's right to a dignified life.