

**Intervention by Martine Ago, Ivory Coast: The United Nations General Assembly High-Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS**

United Nations Headquarters - New York, USA, June 1, 2006

Your Excellency, the president of the United Nations General Assembly; Your Excellence, the Secretary General of the United Nations; and honored invitees, ladies and gentlemen:

I am Martine Ago, representative of sex professionals, from the Ivory Coast, a country that knows firsthand a military-political crisis with its crushing poverty, violence and degradation of the health system.

It is a great honour for me to speak to you as a member of civil society and in the name of organizations and associations of people living with HIV. This is effectively the first time in the history of the UN that the voice of positive sex workers has been heard in a formal session.

Thank you, Secretary General, for this unique moment. I am here to introduce a film showing perspectives of civil society from four regions of the world. In this film, you will see how civil society has struggled to be heard and has finally been recognised today for its critical role in the struggle against HIV.

I am a peer educator and president of a group of HIV-positive sex workers, called Blety.

We work with Clinique de Confiance, which is dedicated solely to male, female and transgender sex workers, and which offers prevention services, testing for sexually transmitted infections and HIV, as well as ARV treatment.

The principal aim of our organisation is to give a human face to HIV, to encourage our peers to be tested, and above all to establish bonds of solidarity among our members to promote mutual assistance, support and the defence of our rights, given that in our work marginalization and stigmatization are ever-present.

If we want the HIV pandemic to recede, countries must fight the criminalisation of sex work and violence, including state violence, against sex workers.

Sex workers rights and reproductive and sexual rights are human rights.

We are not the problem but part of the solution.

My message is that in the struggle against HIV it is urgent and essential for our states to commit to making the most elementary means of prevention, male and female condoms, permanently available.

In addition, given the excellent results obtained in certain countries, particularly mine, specific human-rights-based policies of prevention and treatment of HIV in the sex worker population should be established in all countries. These policies should be recognized and supported by UNAIDS and other international institutions.

I thank you for your kind attention and wish each and every one of you an excellent conference.

Thank you.