



National Security and
International Affairs Division

B-281029

September 15, 1998

The Honorable Benjamin A. Gilman
Chairman, Committee on International Relations
House of Representatives

Subject: Update on the U.N.'s HIV/AIDS Program

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In July 1998, we reported on the U.N.'s efforts to respond to the worldwide Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) epidemic.¹ As you requested, we obtained information from the United Nations on actions that it has taken since we completed the fieldwork for our July 1998 report. We did not independently verify this information.

BACKGROUND

The United Nations created the Joint Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) in January 1996 to replace its original effort led by the World Health Organization that focused on the medical and public health aspects of the disease. UNAIDS is intended to be a more comprehensive approach to HIV/AIDS, drawing on the experience and skills of several U.N. agencies. UNAIDS is composed of a Secretariat, which is the coordinating unit, and six U.N. agency cosponsors.²

In our July 1998 report, we raised a number of concerns about the extent to which UNAIDS had made progress toward meeting its goal of leading an expanded and broad-based, worldwide response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Specifically, we noted that (1) U.N. spending on HIV/AIDS had not risen since the creation of UNAIDS and data were not available to measure progress in

¹HIV/AIDS: USAID and U.N. Response to the Epidemic in the Developing World (GAO/NSIAD-98-202, July 27, 1998).

²UNAIDS consists of the following six agencies: the U.N. Children's Fund; the U.N. Development Program; the U.N. Population Fund; the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; the World Health Organization; and the World Bank.

mobilizing resources from other sources; (2) the UNAIDS Secretariat had not yet developed a framework for evaluating its efforts; (3) "theme groups", which are the forum for coordinating U.N. cosponsoring agency activities in the field, had a difficult start and, in some countries, cosponsor agencies were just beginning to work together; and (4) the UNAIDS Secretariat had not provided useful technical support and information to the theme groups.

RESULTS IN BRIEF

According to UNAIDS Secretariat officials, the United Nations has taken action on many of the issues we raised in our July 1998 report. Specifically, Secretariat officials stated that HIV/AIDS spending data are being verified; private sector mobilization efforts by the Secretariat are continuing; an evaluation framework has been developed; several positive steps have been taken by theme groups in the Dominican Republic, Honduras, India, and the Philippines; and technical support and information for theme groups has been improved.

SPENDING ON HIV/AIDS

In response to our concern that U.N. spending on HIV/AIDS had not increased as expected since the creation of UNAIDS, the UNAIDS Secretariat told us that it is completing its study on HIV/AIDS expenditures.³ However, the Secretariat said that data on spending by U.N. agencies and donors in each country as reported by recipient countries differs from estimates provided by donors and U.N. agencies. World Bank estimates, for example, were significantly lower than those provided by recipient countries. As a result, Secretariat officials said that they are verifying the data and that where discrepancies exist, the data will be sent back to countries, donors, and U.N. agencies for validation. In addition, the Secretariat said that it plans to use the data verification process to begin to develop agreement on a common system of reporting for HIV/AIDS expenditures.

PRIVATE SECTOR MOBILIZATION

Regarding actions taken to mobilize the private sector, the UNAIDS Secretariat provided information summarizing recent efforts by the Secretariat and the Global Business Council on HIV/AIDS, which the UNAIDS Secretariat helped support. This information included a report on the international corporate response to HIV/AIDS. It also summarized efforts to develop material to guide

³Draft report entitled, National and International Financing of the National Response to HIV/AIDS, UNAIDS/PCB(6)/98.3 (Geneva, Switzerland: May 24, 1998).

intervention efforts by the private sector in the workplace and described an initiative to increase public information and raise money for HIV/AIDS prevention efforts. The UNAIDS Secretariat identified two other Secretariat efforts to mobilize the private sector. In South Africa, the Secretariat worked with the South African Business Council on HIV/AIDS to develop a strategy on HIV/AIDS. This strategy was intended to increase the participation of the private sector in the response to HIV/AIDS in South Africa by encouraging partnerships among the private sector, public sector, and not for profit organizations. The Secretariat also worked with Rotary International to promote AIDS awareness in Rotary projects and publications including the Rotary World newspaper and THE ROTARIAN magazine.

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The Secretariat reported that it has developed an evaluation and monitoring plan that will be reviewed at a September 20-22, 1998, meeting of its Monitoring and Evaluation Technical Review Group. This plan specifies goals and indicators that will be used by the Secretariat and cosponsoring agencies to measure the U.N.'s progress in responding to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The group will present a final plan to its oversight board, the Program Coordinating Board, at the next meeting in early December 1998.

THEME GROUP PROGRESS IN CASE STUDY COUNTRIES

The UNAIDS Secretariat reported positive developments on theme group efforts in several countries we visited since we conducted our fieldwork. For example, it reported that in the Dominican Republic, the theme group is currently working with the government to formulate a national HIV/AIDS strategic plan; in Honduras, the theme group helped the government develop its strategic plan for HIV/AIDS, which was completed in June 1998; in India, U.N. cosponsor agencies and the Secretariat prepared an integrated U.N. workplan on HIV/AIDS to coordinate cosponsoring agency activities, and worked closely with the World Bank to prepare documents for funding India's \$300 million 5-year national HIV/AIDS plan. According to the Secretariat, U.N. agencies also participated in a review of the Indian government's HIV/AIDS program and participated in a series of meetings with the government and other donors to discuss opportunities for further partnerships in implementing India's HIV/AIDS program. In the Philippines, the Secretariat noted that the theme group was a key partner in promoting the passage of the Philippines Prevention and Control Act of 1998. This act establishes the framework for Philippine national HIV/AIDS prevention efforts.

TECHNICAL SUPPORT AND INFORMATION

In response to our concern about the lack of useful technical support and information for the theme groups, the Secretariat provided a copy of its "Resource Guide for Theme Groups". It plans to send the guide to theme group field representatives in early September 1998. The guide outlines the role of the theme groups and provides information on how to plan and implement a joint U.N. effort. In addition, the UNAIDS Secretariat has distributed draft strategic planning guides to help theme groups assist countries in developing national HIV/AIDS strategies.

Finally, the UNAIDS Secretariat reported that it has improved its "best practice" documents, noting that 162 best practice guides have been distributed as of September 1998. The Secretariat said that initial best practice documents focused on policy guidance or technical discussions of a specific issue. However, in an attempt to be more responsive to the needs of the theme groups, its subsequent documents include a mixture of policy guidance, implementation guides, case studies, and examples of resource materials.

While acknowledging the need for more substantial investments in technical support and information in the future, the UNAIDS Secretariat reported progress in working with several regional technical resource networks. The goal of these networks is to provide better technical assistance to theme group and national government activities, including the Regional AIDS Initiative for Latin America and the Caribbean (SIDALAC), and the Asia Pacific HIV/AIDS Internet Information and Support Service. A UNAIDS official reported that UNAIDS was heavily involved in establishing SIDALAC and its program of work. UNAIDS has been involved closely in SIDALAC's steering committee.

AGENCY COMMENTS

We discussed the contents of this letter with the UNAIDS Secretariat and they agreed that it was a fair representation of actions taken in response to our report.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

To gather information on actions taken by the United Nations after we completed the audit work for our July 1998 report, we requested the Director of UNAIDS to provide an update of efforts and where possible to give us documentation supporting these efforts. In response, the UNAIDS Secretariat gave us data on efforts underway with international business groups; a copy of UNAIDS 1998 "Resource Guide for Theme Groups"; 1996-97 "Theme Group Survey and Results"; reports on activities of various regional HIV/AIDS

organizations sponsored by UNAIDS; and documents relating to strategic planning and other efforts undertaken in countries we visited (the Dominican Republic, Honduras, India, and the Philippines). Finally, the Secretariat provided written explanations of various efforts UNAIDS has underway on issues that we raised in our report. We did not independently verify information provided to us by UNAIDS officials.

We conducted our work in Washington, D.C., between August and September 1998 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

We are sending copies of this letter to interested congressional committees, the Secretary of State, the Administrator of USAID, and the Director of the Office of Management and Budget. Copies will be made available to others on request.

Please contact me at (202) 512-4128 if you or your staff have any questions concerning this letter. Major contributors to this letter were Lynne Holloway and Tom Zingale.

Sincerely yours,



Benjamin F. Nelson, Director
International Relations and Trade Issues

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