



## **GHANA HIV AND AIDS NETWORK (GHANET)**

### **STATEMENT BY GHANA HIV AND AIDS NETWORK ON PRESIDENT JOHN DRAMANI MAHAMA'S COMMITMENT TO FILL IN THE FUNDING GAP OCCASIONED BY THE USAID FUNDING FREEZE**

The Ghana HIV and AIDS Network (GHANET) heartily welcomes the reaffirmed commitment by His Excellency, President John Dramani Mahama, in the 2025 State of the Nation Address (SONA), to shore up the shortfalls from the USAID 90-day funding freeze.

As a matter of record, this is about the third time in two weeks the President of the Republic is making a commitment to fill in the USAID funding gap which will heavily impact the health sector (especially HIV and AIDS) in the 2025 fiscal year.

GHANET, as a major stakeholder in the national response against HIV and AIDS (since 1996), deems the commitment from the President as both reassuring and therapeutic. This is because ever since the US government placed the USAID stop work order, there has been pandemonium in the PLHIV (persons living with HIV) community in Ghana.

Topping the concerns of PLHIV in the country is the fear that there might be a stockout of Antiretroviral (ARV) medications in the near future if the government has to take full responsibility of procuring ARVs. This fear is heightened by recent happenings where even donated ARVs were nonchalantly abandoned at the ports for several months.

According to data from Ghana AIDS Commission (GAC), as at December 2023, the number of PLHIV on treatment stood at about 151,000. This number is less than half of the estimated 334,000 PLHIV in the country. This means there is a lot of work to be done to find all PLHIV for them to be brought into care.

In view of the above, GHANET would like to make the following short-term proposal to the Government:

#### **i. Operationalization of the National HIV and AIDS Fund**

It would be recalled that following the amendment of the GAC Act (Act 938) in October 2016, the previous Mahama administration started the process of establishing the National HIV and AIDS Fund (NHAF). However, this process was cut short following the change of government in January 2017. It had been the hope and prayer of HIV and AIDS advocates in the country that the succeeding government was going to continue with the process. Quite regrettably, in spite of all the prompting and prodding, the fund experienced stillbirth throughout the eight years.

In the absence of the Fund, the operations of GAC and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which hitherto included campaigns in the mass media, academic institutions, local communities (including churches, mosques, marketplaces, lorry stations etc.) have all come to a halt. As a result, in the last decade and thereabouts, there has been a new generation of young people who practically have no



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knowledge or understanding of the menace of HIV and AIDS. It therefore did not come as a surprise when the country recorded 17,700 new infections and 12,500 AIDS-related deaths in 2023 alone.

It is the expectation of GHANET, and all HIV and AIDS stakeholders, that the operationalization of NHAf will make available enough domestic resources to complement what the country currently receives from the Global Fund and other international partners. This would ensure that, at all times, the country would be in a position to buy life-saving ART for PLHIVs.

As a medium-term measure, GHANET would like to recommend:

### **ii. Local Manufacturing of ART Medications and Related Commodities**

Fortunately for Ghana, there is an already existing capacity for local production of ARTs (since 2005). GHANET believes that the country must leverage on this capacity to be able to meet its needs for ARVs. Beyond Ghana, these productions can be marketed to our neighbouring countries in the West Africa sub-region (some of whose PLHIV population far exceeds that of Ghana). Also, beyond ARV production, the country must consider the feasibility and viability of local production of HIV-related commodities such as condoms, lubricants, test kits etc.

In conclusion, GHANET appeals to the Ministers for Finance and Health to ensure that the SONA commitment of the President would be translated into reality in the 2025 budget. Undoubtedly, the time has come for us, as a country, to take steps to actualize the Abuja Declaration (2001) which enjoins African countries to commit not less than 15 percent of their annual budgets to the health sector.

Signed:

**ERNEST AMOABENG ORTSIN**

**(PRESIDENT)**

February 28, 2025



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