

Press Statement from Kenya AIDS Civil Society • 18 Feb 2013
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AIDS GROUPS CHEER FIRST MAJOR NEW COMMITMENT BY PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: RAILA ODINGA PLEDGES AIDS DRUGS FOR ALL AND 15% FOR HEALTH
CSOS Call on Uhuru+the others to meet this challenge, or risk 1.6 million HIV voters

[Bomet, Kenya] On Sunday 17 February, Prime Minister Raila Odinga made a landmark statement at a campaign rally in Bomet, Kenya promising to commit at least 15% of the national budget to health, and to offer free antiretroviral drugs to *all* people living with HIV. This will require the government to update its HIV treatment guidelines to allow earlier initiation of AIDS treatment.

The PM is the first presidential candidate to directly address the HIV epidemic. AIDS activists and PLHIV networks from across Kenya were on the ground in Bomet with placards when Odinga made the statement, and immediately released this in response:

“We applaud the Prime Minister’s historic statement promising AIDS drugs to all, and to increase domestic health budgets. We will spread the word about this statement to our networks,” said Jacque Wambui of NEPHAK and Health GAP Kenya. “Now, Uhuru, Musalia and the rest must step up immediately, or else they will lose the competition for 1.6 million Kenyans with HIV, their friends families and loved ones,” she said. “Life threatening illnesses can transcend other local affiliations. Candidates are well advised to take strong note of the HIV vote in Kenya.”

17 people living with HIV came to the rally with placards demanding AIDS drugs. The demand comes from the PLHIV Manifesto; a set of recommendations for presidential aspirants developed by NEPHAK, Health GAP and AIDS Law Project after a series of consultations with grassroots AIDS voters from across the country.

In front of thousands of cheering supporters and members of the media, The Prime Minister stated the following “Yes, we will dedicate 15 % of the Kenyan budget to health. Yes, we will give free ARV’s to people living with HIV.” After making these major commitments, the Prime Minister continued, “HIV is a disease like any other, and people living with HIV are part of our society. We all deserve to be healthy.”

Activists applauded the statement, showing that finally, candidates are acknowledging that earlier initiation of more people with HIV on better AIDS medications can reduce new sexual infections by more than 96%--effectively bringing a rapid end to the epidemic in Kenya. Civil society group will hold the PM and all other candidates to their demand for an HIV-free generation in Kenya before the end of the next government.