



Dear Colleagues,

I take this opportunity to thank you all for your outstanding engagement in preparing for the 20<sup>th</sup> International Conference on AIDS and STIs in Africa (ICASA2019) organized in Kigali from 2-7 December 2019. Discussions and resolutions that concluded the conference reflected a successful event.

Participants from all over the world gathered and discussed goals and long-term objectives in the fight against HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Africa, as a continent showed current progress towards the decrease of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on the continent. In this line, different countries presented evaluation data partnering to their status on the WHO 90-90-90 targets.

Rwanda has always made commitments to fight against HIV since the early 80's when first HIV cases were identified at the University Teaching Hospital of Kigali. A National AIDS Control Program was established to serve as an institution mandated to help the country address HIV as a public health concern and development threat.

During ICASA 2019, among other success stories, Rwanda discussed national priorities and strategies put in place to integrate HIV prevention across different developmental sectors.

In addition, the government of Rwanda developed a national plan for universal access to HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment through the decentralization of services and their use by the population. Consequently, the number of health facilities offering voluntary counseling and testing for HIV rose.

This contributed directly to increased numbers of people screened/tested, considerable decreases of mother to child transmission of HIV were registered. The population also had increased access to antiretroviral treatment (ART) drugs. Consequently, Rwanda was able to reduce HIV incidences/new infections, stabilizing the prevalence at 3% for many years now. Rwanda's great achievement from HIV programs and strategies is the attainment of the WHO 90-90-90 target before 2030.

This global target and other successes in addressing HIV as well as STIs were met due to strong political will and good leadership: the government was and is still committed to establishing strong multi-sectoral approaches involving developmental partners, civil society organizations, and private NGOs. This approach allowed Rwanda to resource mobilize both at the national and international level, implement evidence-based strategies, to effectively decentralize national responses, to build capacities and to encourage community participation.

Despite these strides, however, much is still needed for Rwanda to sustain these achievements and register even more improved records towards an Africa with zero new infections and other universal goals. The country's current focus is on generating local research findings, cost-effective interventions and innovations on HIV preventive activities, for better well-informed decision-making processes. Health education for behavior change targeting at high-risk populations is as well at the core mission of our strategies.

As I commend all efforts behind the organization and success of ICASA2019, I would like to further call upon RPHB readers (particularly Rwandan public health professionals) to continuously put in your efforts toward the country and global anti-HIV/AIDS resolutions. I hope that by 2030, Rwanda will stand proud as it did during this conference.

Enjoy your reading of the RPHB 3<sup>rd</sup> Issue.



Dr. Sabin Nsanzimana  
Director General  
Rwanda Biomedical Center