



**SOUTH ASIAN ASSOCIATION  
FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION  
SECRETARIAT**

**Message**

**“Take the rights path: My health, my right!”**

World AIDS Day is a global movement to unite people in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Since 1988, communities have stood together to show strength and solidarity against HIV stigma and to remember the lives lost. Each year, on 1<sup>st</sup> December, World AIDS Day is celebrated with the objective to unite people in the fight against HIV and AIDS. It is an opportunity to join partners, communities and leaders to champion the right to health by addressing the inequalities that hinder progress in ending AIDS, under the theme **“Take the rights path: My health, my right!”**.

Today many scientific advances have been made in HIV diagnosis treatment and management. Various laws, rules and regulations have been put in place to protect people living with HIV (PLHIV). Despite recent developments, stigma and discrimination still prevail. In 2023, estimated 39.9 million people were living with HIV and 630,000 people died due to HIV related causes globally. The region is home for estimated number of 2.83 million people living with HIV/AIDS, 68,600 new HIV infections and around 52,000 AIDS related deaths in 2022 alone. However, all Member States of the SAARC are designated as low prevalence countries. The overall adult HIV prevalence in SAARC region remains below 1%.

It is heartening to see that all the SAARC Member States have developed their strategic plans for fighting HIV/AIDS. In addition, Member States have increased access to and coverage of life saving treatment, reduced HIV new infection and has accelerated efforts to eliminate risk for vulnerable populations.

In commemorating this day, I would like to express my appreciation to the National Program of SAARC Member States for their efforts to prevent the spread of this deadly disease. I also appreciate the role of media and civil society group in creating awareness to educate and inform citizens against the myriad dangers posed by the virus.

This year's theme “Take the rights path: My health, my right!” respects the rights of people emphasizing the importance of safeguarding their rights and dignity to live free from stigma, discrimination and prejudice. Ensuring equal access to treatment is vital for HIV care and prevention. This year's theme highlights the need to make treatment accessible to everyone, free from economic or social barriers. It also extends to promote access to preventive information and resources need to raise awareness on human rights aspect of HIV/AIDS prevention.

Today, I call for intensified National and Regional solidarity in achieving the goal for HIV/AIDS prevention to ensure that people are free from its effects in the Member States.

(Md. Golam Sarwar)  
Secretary General of SAARC

Kathmandu, 29 November 2024