

Opening Statement  
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This is a remarkable gathering of representatives of government and multilateral agencies, private pharmaceutical companies whose businesses are based on research and development as well as those based on low-cost generic production, non-governmental organizations and academicians. We have assembled together in this room representatives of the entire spectrum of those from South and North who must play a role in making available essential drugs to the world's poor – producers, service deliverers, advocates, and gadflies. We are all in this together and it's about time that we sat down and talked.

Globalization has driven many of the changes witnessed in the world over the past decade, but it has also highlighted inequities. Whether the forces of globalization are to blame or not, it is clear that the poorest of the poor are worse off today than they were ten years ago. And we recognize that poor women are at the very bottom of the economic ladder and at highest risk in terms of their health and well-being.

It is wrong when a woman dies because she cannot afford the basic care that could save her life. And it is socially and politically destabilizing to have a world divided into medical "haves" and "have-nots." We can and we must take concrete steps to correct this growing imbalance.

For the past two years the issues of patents and pricing have held center stage because of their linkage with the exploding global AIDS pandemic and the tens of millions of victims who have no effective access to care. However, this meeting is not just about AIDS drugs; it is about essential drugs for the range of diseases that burden the health of the poor, and what practical steps can be taken to assure that price is not a principal barrier to their access.

Three million people died from AIDS last year, but another 14 million died as a result of other infectious diseases and reproductive ill-health. But this was just the tip of the iceberg. Hundreds of millions of episodes of illness took place among the world's poor that further imprisoned them in the grips of poverty and desperation, that deprived them of their livelihoods and dignity. Many of these illnesses could either now or in the near future benefit from on-patent drugs. So let us cast a wide net as we discuss these issues over the next three days.

The issues encompassed by differential pricing and financing of essential drugs – in other words the issues surrounding the affordability of pharmaceutical products for those who most desperately need them – are a necessary but not sufficient aspect of assuring care and in reducing the global burden of disease among the most vulnerable. We are not looking to address all of these issues in the short time we have, so our focus is clearly on one piece of the overall challenge. We make no pretense of using this forum to address the broader agenda.

We also have no illusions about the outcome of this meeting. We do not look to emerge from these discussions with the *answer* to the challenges of equity pricing and intellectual property. But we do look to generate a set of common understandings about the real issues facing us so that progress can be made.

Most importantly, we hope that progress at this meeting will allow the global community to move beyond an exclusive focus on prices and patents so that the vital and broad areas of care and prevention can receive the international attention they so desperately deserve. And, in doing this, I hope we will take some small steps towards finding ways to bring *all* the world's people to the global banquet table.