Annie Lennox, International AIDS Groups Urge U.K. to Honor Universal Access Commitments

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Pop star and AIDS advocate Annie Lennox joined African ministers and heads of International AIDS groups to call on U.K. International Development Minister Gareth Thomas to honor G8 countries' pledge to achieve universal access to HIV prevention, treatment and care worldwide by 2010. The pledge was made in 2005 at the United Kingdom-led Gleneagles G8 Summit in 2005.

The Group of Eight, or G8, refers to the yearly summit with the leaders of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States plus the European Union. A similar group, the G20, consists of financial and economic leaders of different countries.

"This is a commitment we cannot break and a fight we cannot lose," Lennox said. "We are still far from reaching the level of care promised for 2010. It is unacceptable that half of the pregnant women who need drugs to protect their own health and their babies cannot get them, that 10 million people in immediate need of treatment have no access. Governments such as the U.K. that have taken significant action to achieve universal access must take a strong stand to encourage those that lag behind to keep their promises on AIDS."

Organizations making the plea with Lennox included UNAIDS, the International AIDS Society and the Global Fund to Prevent AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

This year's G8 and G20 summits will be held June 25 through 27 in Canada, which is the only country that opposes the United Kingdom-endorsed Financial Transactions Tax, a slight tax on financial transactions that could help raise the funds necessary to meet the 2010 goal.

"Evidence demonstrates the incredible positive impacts that come from HIV treatment scale-up," International AIDS Society president Julio Montaner said. "Broad access to HIV treatment saves lives and substantially reduces new HIV infections by lowering the infectiousness of people with HIV. Well-programmed AIDS funding strengthens health systems and expands access to essential health services such as immunization and vaccination. Today we ask the U.K. to not only redouble its efforts to achieve universal access, but also to work to ensure that the universal access pledge remains high on the global agenda—at the G8 and G20 summits and beyond."

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