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Mr. Chairman of the Commission,
Excellencies,
Esteemed friends

Caring societies are in recession

It troubles me greatly to say that caring societies are in recession.

We are bombarded with news and reports of increasingly terrible acts perpetrated on women. In South Africa according the Medical Research Council of Cape Town University, one in four women report being abused by an intimate partner – and every six hours a woman is killed¹. In the UK according to the British Crime Survey, 1.6 million women are sexually abused each year.

Those decisions are shaped by deeply engrained social norms and ruthless economic realities.

But let us get real.

These realities make a mockery of the notion of choice. They are a reminder of the tragic consequences of the social construction of gender. These reflect our unjust and often male-dominated societies and even our development paradigms.

Let me be honest. My fear is that the recession in caring societies will be aggravated by the global financial crisis.

The crisis is already causing civil strife – and in its wake the position of women is further eroded. Nothing short of a social revolution is now required to deliver on the commitments we have made to gender equality.

A key to HIV prevention, and also to achieving gender equality in all aspects of life including care giving, is universal access to sexuality education. Such education provides full and accurate information; it promotes gender equality and respect for human rights. This will help young people develop the skills for mutual consent in sex and marriage and put an end to violence and sexual coercion.

Third, the social revolution calls for a shift in the development agenda – poverty reduction must be accompanied by the growth in dignity and freedom. We need new models of development

Join me to unite the women's and AIDS movements

My friends, I have called for bold, collective action to achieve universal access and to achieve

gender equality.

