

## *Speech*

### **United Nations PATH/Global Campaign for Microbicides Giving Women Power Over AIDS Reception**

*Mrs. Nane Annan,  
Artist, Lawyer, Wife to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan  
United Nations, 2 June 2005*

Thank you so much. Dear friends, it is very moving to be here with you tonight and together see this exhibition *In Her Mother's Shoes*. Seeing Martha, Ruth's daughter trying on her mother's sandals and trying to remember her is heartbreaking. Ruth, who at 17, married a much older man, cared for him as he wasted away from AIDS, herself already infected. Ruth, wondering who would care for her children.

I would like to tell you about one account from my visit to Kenya last year. We set off early one morning on a journey into the heart of Nairobi's largest slums to visit KENWA, the Kenya Network of Women with AIDS, a grassroots group formed by HIV positive women, not only caring for themselves but also caring for others. We arrived at their location, and yet we were not there yet; we were rushed on by foot over open gutters, along narrow, muddy pathways until we reached a room in complete darkness. Even with the help of a faint kerosene lamp it was difficult to see the face of the woman lying in the bed. Her name was Beatrice and she was desperately sick from AIDS, and she was being cared for by Esther from KENWA. Esther was caring for 5 to 6 patients a week. She said she was doing this because it helped her realize how much better off she was, while we were thinking how amazing she was in overcoming her own difficulties and defying stigma and discrimination to care for others. Beatrice, her patient, had been infected by her husband. After he died, she left her village and moved to the big city, ending up in this dark room, which seemed like the end of the world. Suddenly a child coughed and we realized that she was not alone in the bed but had a 16 month old baby lying next to her. A tear rolled down her cheek as we stood around her. If it wasn't for Esther nobody might even have known that she was there and nobody would be watching out for her or her baby.

Many women are infected by their husbands or partners or as a result of violence and coercion. It seems that all the inequalities between men and women are brought to head in the face of AIDS. My husband has said what is needed is real positive change that will give more power and confidence to women and girls and transform relations at all levels of society. Change that will strengthen legal protection of women's property and inheritance rights. Change that makes men assume the responsibility in ensuring an education for their daughters, abstaining from sexual behavior that puts others at risk, foregoing relations with girls and very young women, and understanding that when it comes to violence against women there are no grounds for tolerance and no tolerable excuses.

The title of tonight's exhibition is *Giving Women Power Over AIDS* and the Global Campaign for Microbicides seeks to do just that by empowering women with greater means and control to protect themselves against infection. And already at the UNGASS [UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS] in 2001 there was a side event on microbicides. And I went to that one and was fascinated to hear how one member after another of the audience asked for the floor to tell them how this would change their lives if microbicides would be available. And they came from all over the world. So thank you for highlighting this issue and spearheading the initiative to give women more power over HIV/AIDS. Thank you very much.