Today, millions of people around the globe are marking the 20th World AIDS Day. For some, this may be the only day in the year they think about AIDS. For many, however, AIDS is part of daily life.

Since the first World AIDS Day in 1988, when the World Health Organization called on everyone to “Join the Worldwide Effort”, AIDS has become one of the defining issues of our time.

The epidemic has globalized – and feminized. In 1988, most recorded cases of HIV were still in the United States, and most were among men. Today, HIV is present in every country in the world, and half those living with HIV are women.

The response has globalized also. Last year, UN Member States committed to scale up towards universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. More than 2.5 million people in developing countries are now receiving life-lengthening antiretroviral drugs. HIV infections, in many countries, are declining.

The challenge now is sustain this leadership, to keep AIDS at the top of the agenda, and to accelerate action at national and local level. Any slackening of leadership would be fatal. The epidemic reached global proportions precisely because it took so long for the world to act.

And although we are beginning to make progress, there remains a long way to go.

There is still a serious shortfall in resources for AIDS, and stigma and discrimination around AIDS continue to prevail. As a result, two-thirds of those who require antiretroviral treatment are unable to access it. Less than one in ten people at risk of HIV infection have the means to protect themselves.

Sustaining leadership and accelerating action on AIDS isn't something just for politicians. It involves religious leaders, community, youth and council leaders, chief executives and trade union leaders. It involves people living with HIV, and their families and friends. It involves you, me – each and every one of us – taking the lead to eliminate stigma and discrimination, to advocate for more resources to tackle AIDS.

And it requires us all to focus on AIDS every day of the year. Only then can we hope to achieve the global goal of universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support.