

Part 1: Main Speech (4 Minutes)

Thank you, Madam Chair, Member States, distinguished delegates, and colleagues.

Let me start by saying thank you for including young people and communities as part of this important conversation.

As someone who works alongside young key populations across Asia and the Pacific, I have seen firsthand how youth-led responses change lives. For many young people, a community- or youth-led organization is often the first place where they feel safe, respected, and understood. It is where they receive information without judgment, where they are connected to services, and where they learn that their health and rights go hand in hand.

Yet today, I worry that while we celebrate progress, we have overlooked the challenges faced by key populations, young people, and other priority groups.

So I want to ask a question: if youth and community leadership is essential, why is it still treated as an optional priority?

Let's look at the reality. Despite repeated commitments to community leadership, only a small proportion of HIV resources reach community-led organizations directly, and even fewer reach organizations led by young key populations.

That reality itself exposes that our words and actions are still far from the goal of building a people-centered and rights-based HIV response.

So now, some might say: but we have made remarkable progress in science, technology, and medicine. Isn't that enough?

The response is no. As mentioned during yesterday's panel session, innovation itself is not enough. It needs an enabling environment that allows it to reach those who need it most. In reality, young people are bearing the direct consequences when innovations are introduced without our realities being reflected.

This is reflected in the latest evidence showing that HIV infections continue to rise in a number of countries, with young people among those most affected. This means that we risk losing a generation to a preventable epidemic.

So what should we do? We need to reach young people where they are: online, in communities, and in everyday conversations.

To end, I am sure that if we continue on this trajectory, the prevention crisis we are seeing across different regions, especially among youth in Asia and the Pacific, will become increasingly difficult to manage. We need to ensure the continuation of youth-led services, the expansion of comprehensive sexuality education and harm reduction education, and the removal of age-related barriers to accessing services and information.

Yesterday, my sister Liliana from Tanzania said it perfectly during the side event: we must move beyond business as usual and instead fund young people as equal partners, not just beneficiaries. We need stronger peer-driven interventions across prevention, treatment, and care. But we also need meaningful engagement in data generation, governance, accountability, and advocacy.

Let me remind everyone that we cannot achieve the 95–95–95 targets without advancing the 30–80–60 community-led response targets and the 10–10–10 societal enabler targets.

With that, I thank you.

Part 2: Closing Remark (2 Minutes)

Thank Erica. Two things stood out the most from today's discussion: first, our collective role in sustaining progress, and second, the indispensable role of communities. We also heard repeatedly about the importance of not losing the gains we have made, not only on the 95–95–95 targets, but also on co-morbidities, mental health, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and other critical areas.

Among these gains, we must always remind ourselves of the investments that have been made in community leadership and community systems. We are seeing the benefits of those investments through peer educators, advocates, and community leaders who continue to support local communities and strengthen national HIV responses.

But to maintain that momentum, we need to stop criminalizing and silencing the very communities that are on the front lines of this response.

Communities and key populations have shown the way forward for decades, but we cannot take these achievements for granted. As mentioned by multiple delegates, communities need to be protected, and they need to be empowered to participate meaningfully in policy-making, programme implementation, decision-making, and governance.

We cannot back down or go backwards. We need to step up and deliver a stronger, people-centred Political Declaration with sustainable financing that protects human rights and gender equality.

Thank you.

Thank you.