



## **Welcome Remarks by Mayor Anne Hidalgo, City of Paris 14 October 2024 ▪ Paris, France**

Esteemed Mayors, Councilors, UN representatives, delegates, community and health leaders, distinguished guests to the Fast-Track Cities 2024 conference.

Dear Elodie Aïna, dear José Zuniga, dear Christophe Martet, my friends, welcome to Paris!

It is my great honor to celebrate with you the 10th anniversary of the Fast-Track Cities network; a network of over 550 cities worldwide committed to end AIDS, HIV transmission and all forms of discrimination and stigma that hinder access to prevention, treatment, and care.

I am proud it all began right here in Paris on World AIDS Day 2014, when we all came together with a bold vision to end AIDS as a public health threat by 2030 by mobilizing local governments in cities and urban centers. I remember it like it was yesterday! The Paris Declaration was written thanks to the determination of four core partners – IAPAC, UNAIDS, UN-Habitat, and the City of Paris.

We made it real here in Paris thanks to the amazing work done by the *Vers Paris sans Sida* team. Dear Elodie, dear Christophe, my gratitude is immense. Our conviction is that we build effective public health, the kind that serves the most vulnerable and the most stigmatized, through local action, as close as possible to the needs. Our political commitment and determination have not wavered since.

Hence, the results are there, 10 years on! In Paris, new HIV diagnosis have dropped by 33% in 10 years, from a thousand in 2014 to a little more than 650 in 2023. Despite the [COVID-19] pandemic, which weakened our healthcare system and slowed our efforts for almost two years, the number of new diagnoses is now 20% lower than in 2019.

These successes are the reward for hard work in overcoming three major challenges:

Our first challenge was screening. We have made considerable progress in this field: +25% HIV tests yearly over the decade. To achieve this, we innovated by inventing a system of direct and free walk-in

access to HIV screening in medical labs in Paris and the Alpes Maritimes. The system was so successful that it has been extended to the entire country, and now accounts for a fifth of tests carried out in France's less densely populated areas, where it is difficult to find a doctor or a sexual health centre. By improving screening, we have made earlier diagnosis: now in Paris, one out of four people discover their HIV+ status within three months after they were infected. And by doing so, we kept our promise: make sure that every person living with HIV is quickly on treatment with an undetectable viral load. For we must say it again out loud: U=U, Undetectable means Untransmittable.

Our second challenge was to increase PrEP coverage. Here too, our efforts to communicate and make this revolutionary prophylaxis commonplace have paid. Between 2016 and 2022, the number of people who initiated PrEP was multiplied by 3.6. Almost 13,000 Parisians take PrEP on a regular basis. Today, thanks to the commitment of our scientists and the entire AIDS community, I hear we are able to go even further with long-acting injectable PrEP, which will simplify the lives of the many men and women who need it to enjoy a fulfilling, fear-free sex life. But I say to you today, solemnly: We will put an end to AIDS worldwide only if long-acting injectable PrEP is accessible to everyone, everywhere, from North to South. I call on each and every one of you to take responsibility for accelerating its widespread implementation at an affordable cost.

Since 2001, Paris has made the fight against HIV/AIDS one of the priorities of its international action. Through an annual grant campaign, over 30 million euros have been donated by the city to NGOs implementing prevention, screening and treatment projects in developing countries.

Our last challenge, undoubtedly the most difficult, was and still is to fight against all the inequalities. For hatreds and prejudices damage individuals and prevent real health equity. In Paris, until now, half of all new HIV cases are among men who have sex with men, one in two of whom was not born in France. We must repeat it over and over again: the experience of migration, racism, homophobia, transphobia, solitude and exclusion is the main driver of the epidemic, here in Paris as in most of your cities. We still have a long way to go to put an end to it. But I am optimistic!

This summer, the Paris Olympic and Paralympic Games reminded us how strong and powerful our common humanity is. Beyond nationalities, beyond disabilities, beyond differences, we celebrated, we thrilled, we loved being together. The spirit of Paris 2024 is still with us, and we are going to keep it that way! It is going to blow over your work during the two days of this Fast-Track Cities 2024 conference. It will carry you, it will carry us, so that together we can make even bigger changes. Together we will keep the promise of a world free of AIDS and discrimination.

Thank you all for coming, and enjoy the conference!