

Headline **UN doubles AIDS effort**  
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# UN doubles AIDS effort

**NEW YORK:** A United Nations summit on Friday ordered a huge expansion in AIDS treatment, but sparked protests by the Vatican and some Muslim nations over its endorsement of condoms and calls to help prostitutes, gays and drug users.

The three-day summit for the 30th anniversary of the discovery of AIDS set the target of more than doubling the number of people on retroviral treatment and eliminating mother-to-child AIDS transmissions by 2015.

"We must win our battle against AIDS, and we will," said Joseph Deiss, president of the UN General Assembly.

About 34 million people around the world have the disease, 1.8 million die from it each year and there are 7,000 new infections each day.

But UN countries are committed "to accelerate efforts to achieve the goal of universal access" to retroviral treatment.

They aim to place 15 million HIV sufferers in the poorest countries on life-extending drugs by 2015. About 6.6 million people currently receive treatment.

The accord also aims to end moth-

er-to-child HIV infection by 2015 and increase preventative measures for the "most vulnerable populations".

Health groups welcomed the declaration, but said the international community must commit the necessary funds to pay for the targets.

The UN estimates the international community will have to find US\$6 billion (RM18 billion) a year to get the extra nine million sufferers onto retroviral treatment.

UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon welcomed the setting of "clear and measurable targets". He called this "an absolute imperative if we are to succeed in realising our vision of

zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths".

The final document makes the most explicit reference yet by a UN summit document to the use of condoms to prevent the spread of AIDS and also calls for greater help for prostitutes, gays and drug users.

There was fierce debate about the wording in weeks of negotiations on the final document, with strong opposition from the Vatican and Muslim nations such as Iran, diplomats involved with the talks said.

Instead of talking simply about the

importance of abstinence and fidelity, the statement stresses the "correct and consistent use of condoms".

"It is important to point out the reference to key populations in this declaration such as men who have sex with men, sex workers, and injecting drug users," said Brazilian Health Minister Alexandre Padilha.

Padilha said the rights of transgenders, transvestites and prisoners also had to be defended.

The Vatican's delegate, Jane Adolthe, was jeered by activists in the General Assembly when she opposed the mention of condoms and the "high risk" population sectors.

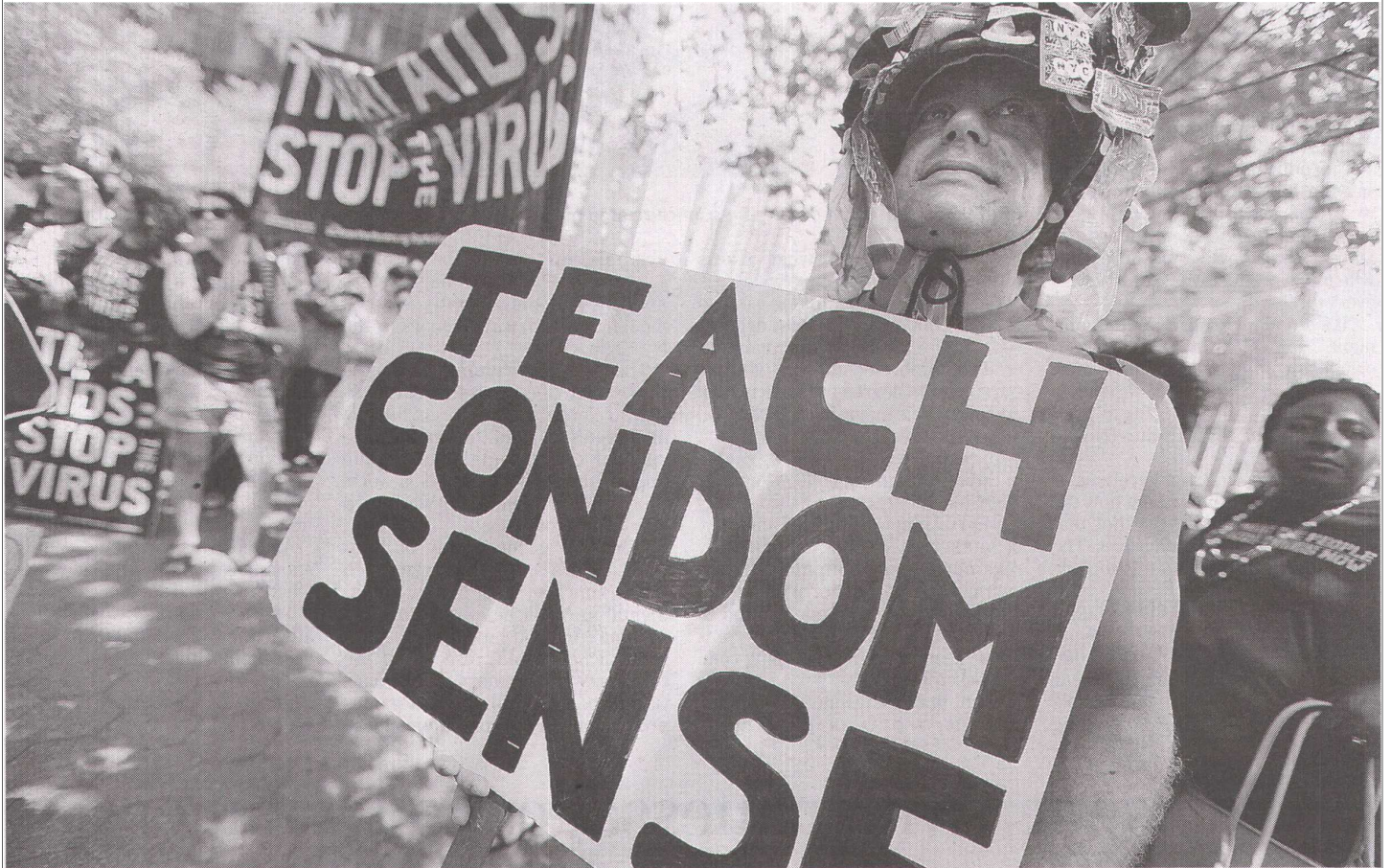
"They can give the impression that certain types of irresponsible behaviour are morally acceptable. The Holy See does not endorse the use of condoms as part of HIV and AIDS prevention programmes."

Iran's acting health minister, Mohammad Hossein Niknam, said his country would not be bound by summit references to "monoethical behaviours" which ran counter to Islamic culture.

Syria also complained about the support for vulnerable groups, saying it should be left to individual countries to decide who to protect. — AFP

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A man wearing a hat adorned with condoms during a rally outside the United Nations' headquarters in New York on Wednesday. — AFP picture