OFFICIAL PRESS STATEMENT
LAUNCH OF ACTIVITIES LEADING TO WORLD AIDS DAY 2026

Delivered by Hon. Cecelia J. Nuta
Chairperson, National AIDS Commission
Date: November 16, 2026
Venue: National AIDS Commission Office, Monrovia, Liberia

Dr. Catrine Cooper, Deputy Minister of Health and Chief Medical Officer, Republic of Liberia, fellow Commissioners of the National AIDS Commission; Representatives of UNAIDS and our Development Partners, Representatives of the National AIDS and STIs Control Program; Representatives of Civil Society Organizations and Networks of People Living with HIV; Representatives of Ministries, Agencies, and Commissions; Our Distinguished Members of the Media; Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good Afternoon.

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the National AIDS Commission for this important press engagement marking the official launch of activities leading to the 2026 World AIDS Day commemoration in Liberia.

On behalf of the National AIDS Commission, I extend our sincere appreciation to our development partners, government institutions, civil society organizations, community representatives, and particularly members of the media who have joined us this afternoon. Your presence demonstrates the importance you attached to the health and well-being of the Liberian people.

Every year, on December 1, Liberia joins countries around the world to commemorate World AIDS Day. It is a day to remember those whose lives have been lost to AIDS-related illnesses, stand in solidarity with persons living with HIV, recognize the progress achieved in responding to the epidemic, and renew our commitment to ending AIDS as a public health threat.

The **Global Theme** for this year's World AIDS Day commemoration is **"ACCESS"** and Liberia has adopted the national slogan:**"ACCESS FOR ALL, GET TESTED, AND SEEK CARE."**

World AIDS Day is more than a date on our national calendar. It is an opportunity to reflect on the realities facing our communities, confront the challenges that continue to undermine HIV prevention and treatment, and remind ourselves that the fight against HIV is far from over.

Over the next few weeks, the National AIDS Commission, working closely with the Ministry of Health, the National AIDS and STIs Control Program, development partners, civil society organizations, community-based organizations, and other stakeholders, will undertake series of activities designed to increase **ACCESS** to accurate HIV information, promote testing and treatment, create awareness on the effects of stigma and discrimination, and strengthen public participation in the national HIV response.

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Our objective is simple: to ensure that the message of World AIDS Day reaches beyond government offices and conference halls into the communities where people live, work, study, worship, and interact.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year's global theme **"ACCESS,"** carry a message that every Liberian should understand. Access means that no person should be denied HIV prevention, testing, treatment, or care because of where they live, their economic circumstances, gender, age, disability, or social status. It means that a young person regardless of where he/she lives should have the opportunity to receive accurate HIV information and appropriate prevention services; It means that a pregnant woman living with HIV should be able to receive the treatment and support necessary to protect her health and greatly reduce the risk of transmitting HIV to her baby.
It means that someone who tests positive for HIV should receive timely treatment, compassionate care, and the assurance that their dignity and confidentiality will be respected.
It also means that persons living with HIV should not have to travel unreasonable distances, face discrimination, or experience unnecessary interruptions in accessing lifesaving medicines.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we must recognize that making HIV services available is only part of the solution. We must also ensure that people can actually access and use those services.
A health facility may exist, but if a person cannot afford transportation to reach it, access remains a challenge.
HIV testing may be available, but if people fear discrimination or rejection, they may choose not to be tested.
Treatment may be effective, but if patients face interruptions in care, the benefits of treatment can be undermined.
This is why the National AIDS Commission believes that access must remain at the center of Liberia's HIV response.

Members of the Press,

As we officially launch activities leading to World AIDS Day, I wish to use this opportunity to share important information about the current state of HIV in Liberia.
This information is particularly important because it provides a clearer understanding of the scale of the epidemic and the level of national commitment required to respond effectively.

The 2026 UNAIDS Spectrum estimates now indicate that approximately **56,000 people are living with HIV in Liberia**. Of this number, an approximately **35,000 are women aged 15 years and above**, **17,400 are men aged 15 years and above** and **3,600 are children below the age of 15**. The UNAIDS Spectrum also estimated that **2,900 people acquired HIV in 2025**, while approximately **1,400 people died from AIDS-related illnesses**. These figures remind us that HIV remains a significant public health concern and that intensified efforts are required to prevent new infections, improve treatment coverage and reduce AIDS-related deaths. To date, of the 56,000 persons estimated to be living with HIV, 40,880 were tested and know their HIV status. Of the 40,880 person who know their HIV status, 33,522 person are on treatment. Of the 33,522 persons on treatment, 30,504 person are virally suppressed. What this means is that out of the 33,522 persons on treatment, 30,504 who are virally suppressed are not transmitting

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HIV because when is person is virally suppressed, it become difficult for that person to infect other with HIV.

Ladies and Gentlemen, members of the press, last year the National AIDS Commission reported that an estimated number of 36,000 people were living with HIV. Today, we are reporting 56,000. Does that mean that 20,000 Liberians became infected with HIV within one year? The answer is no. New HIV infection for 2025 according to the UNAIDS Spectrum estimates is 2,900. It is important to understand that the number of people living with HIV is not the same as the number of new HIV infections.
The estimated number of people living with HIV represents the total population believed to be living with the virus at a particular time, including people who have lived with HIV for many years.
New HIV infections, on the other hand, refer specifically to people who acquire the virus during a given period. We will continue to education the public and provide additional clarification.

What we can say with confidence is that the updated estimate points to a greater HIV burden than previously reported, and this requires serious attention because behind every statistic is a human being. A mother, a father, a young person, a child, a friend, or a colleague whose health and future matter.

Members of the press,

Allow me now outline the major activities and events that will be undertaken between November 16 and December 1, 2026 across Liberia.

1. **Launch of the 120-Day HIV Acceleration Plan**

This plan was developed by the National AIDS Commission with technical support from the National AIDS and STIs Control Program in response to the 2026 UNAIDS Spectrum Estimate which I just report.

2. **Nationwide HIV Awareness and Community Mobilization**

One of the major components of this year's activities will be targeted HIV awareness and community engagement.Working through our partners and community-based organizations, we intend to reach people in marketplaces, schools, universities, colleges, motorcyclist gathering points, car washing centers, transportation hubs, churches, mosques, and other strategic community locations.

3. **Media Engagement and Public Awareness**

During the period leading to World AIDS Day, the Commission and its partners will engage radio and television institutions through talk shows, interviews, public awareness broadcasts, and the airing of HIV education messages and jingles. These engagements will provide opportunities to discuss **ACCESS** to HIV prevention, testing, treatment and the importance of early diagnosis. The manner in which HIV information is presented can influence whether someone decides to get tested, seek treatment, or disclose their status to a trusted healthcare provider. We therefore encourage our media partners to report accurately, protect confidentiality, avoid stigmatizing language, and help communities understand the basic facts of HIV and AIDS.

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4. **Empowering Young People through HIV Education**

The fouth activity will focus on young people. As part of this year's commemoration, an Inter-High School Debate Competition will bring together selected senior high schools in and around Montserrado and Grand Bassa Counties.

The competition will provide students with an opportunity to discuss ACCESS to HIV prevention, stigma reduction, misinformation, and the role of young people in promoting responsible health behavior.

5. **Community Dialogue and the Elimination of Stigma and Discrimination**

The fifth major activity will focus on community dialogue and the elimination of HIV-related stigma and discrimination. Despite the progress made in HIV treatment and prevention, stigma remains one of the barriers preventing people from accessing services. Some individuals are afraid to get tested because they fear what others may say about them.

6. **Advancing Country Ownership and Sustainability**

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, the sixth major activity of focus will be country ownership and the sustainability of Liberia's HIV response.

For many years, Liberia has benefited from the generous support of international development partners. Through these partnerships, we have made important progress in HIV prevention, testing, treatment, care, and institutional strengthening. The 2026 World AIDS Day will also provide an opportunity to highlight progress, acknowledge existing gaps, and strengthen advocacy for domestic resource mobilization.

7. **Offical World AIDS Day Commemoration Ceremony**

On Tuesday, December 1, the offical world AIDS Day Program will be held in Buchana, Grand Bassa County. We want to use this medium to invite officials of government, development partners, civil society actors, Person living with HIV, the media and the general public to join us in Buchana on December 1, 2026.

We therefore look forward to working with the Grand Bassa County authorities, local stakeholders, civil society organizations, healthcare providers, and community leaders to make the national commemoration meaningful.

CONCLUSION AND OFFICIAL LAUNCH

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we begin the activities leading to World AIDS Day 2026, let us remember that our responsibility extends beyond the events we organize. The true measure of our success will be the number of people we reach, the awareness we create, the individuals we encourage to seek testing, the people we help to access treatment, and the barriers we work together to remove.

The updated estimate of 56,000 people living with HIV reminds us of the scale of the responsibility before us. It should not discourage us. Rather, it should strengthen our determination to improve prevention, expand testing, sustain treatment, and ensure that no one is left behind.

On behalf of the Commissioners and staff of the National AIDS Commission, I express our sincere appreciation to H. E. Joseph N. Boakia, Sr. for his leadership, to the Ministry of Health, the National AIDS Control Program, the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, UNAIDS, our development partners, civil society organizations, networks of people living with

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HIV, community leaders, and the media for their continued contributions to Liberia's HIV response.

I also want to extend my appreciation to the 2026 World AIDS Day Planning Committee and other stakeholders who are working to ensure the successful implementation of the activities leading to the national commemoration in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County.

It is therefore my honor, as Chairperson of the National AIDS Commission, to officially launch the activities leading to the 2026 World AIDS Day commemoration in the Republic of Liberia.

Thank you.

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