Thank you very much for this opportunity to discuss the role of civil society in the global AIDS response. I am honoured to be with so many champions of this cause.

You brought us this far. Thirty years ago, HIV was a terrifying death sentence. Ignorance and fear led to stigma and even more new infections. Thanks to you, the world learned to embrace people living with HIV, draw on their experience, and wage a global drive to end AIDS.

I am proud and privileged to start my day in Durban with you – the representatives of civil society.

Your commitment is outstanding. Meeting first with you is my way of telling the world that you should be first in all discussions of the global AIDS response.

Unfortunately, we still have to battle discrimination on two fronts: against vulnerable groups in local communities – and against their representatives in the international community.

Please know that I am always on your side – on the side of inclusion, tolerance and trust.

That is why I strongly denounced the decision to exclude some lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender organizations from last month’s High-Level Meeting on Ending AIDS. I stressed that these NGOS are close to communities affected by the epidemic – and any credible response must include them.

This virus loves stigma and discrimination because they help it spread.
To stop AIDS, we need to foster a true sense of inclusiveness and belonging.

Without civil society and non-governmental organizations, the world never would have come this far.

In the early days of AIDS, you helped spark a revolution and open people’s eyes. Now, thirty years later, you are still our greatest strength.

Excellencies,
Colleagues,
Friends,

This is the first International AIDS Conference since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. And it follows the very successful High-Level Meeting last month.

The world has made tremendous progress. Seventeen million people receive treatment. AIDS-related deaths dropped by 400,000 over the past five years.

We now have a precious window of opportunity. We can end this epidemic by 2030. But to do that, we need commitment and funding. Without that, we could lose ground. It would be tragic to let so much progress slip away.

Six days ago, UNAIDS warned that advances are stalling.

Its new report shows that over the past five years, 1.9 million adults have become infected with HIV every year.

And – even more alarming – the numbers are rising in some regions.

We have to intensify the fight.

We have to do more than tackle a virus – we have to stand strong for gender equality, human rights and human dignity.

We have to raise our voices together to demand equal treatment for all.

We especially have to support people living with HIV, men who have sex with men, people who use drugs, transgender individuals, sex workers, prisoners and others who might be at risk.

We also have to close the funding gap. Donor contributions have dropped by more than a billion dollars – from $9.7 billion three years ago to just over $8 billion last year.
We know how to stop AIDS. Science is on our side. So is innovation. The research is promising.

I am here in Durban with a strong call to close the prevention gap.

This will save costs – and spare millions of people from suffering for generations to come.

Dear friends,

I am very moved to be back in South Africa on Nelson Mandela International Day.

Last month at the High-Level Meeting, I had the honour to see his grandson, Ndaba Mandela.

He declared: “My grandfather was not afraid of the truth. Nelson Mandela instead spoke out loudly and with dignity.”

Ndaba’s father was Madiba’s only son, who died of AIDS.

Nelson Mandela was determined that his death would not be in vain. He started a national dialogue on AIDS in South Africa and around the world.

On this International Day, let us be inspired by the courage and strength of Nelson Mandela in advancing our vision of an AIDS-free world.

Thank you.