



UNAIDS salutes country leadership to eliminate HIV-related restrictions on entry, stay and residence

Calls for 51 remaining countries with such "travel restrictions" to take action towards their removal

VIENNA, 20 July 2010—UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibé applauded today the leadership displayed by China, Namibia and the United States of America to lift their travel restrictions for people living with HIV, while calling for similar action in all countries that continue to employ such discriminatory measures.

Namibia is the most recent of the three countries to remove HIV-related restrictions on entry, stay and residence. Its reforms—which took effect on 1 July—also remove such restrictions against people living with other contagious diseases. "Namibia is very pleased to lift travel restrictions," said Hon. Richard Kamwi, the Namibian Minister of Health, speaking at a press conference at the International AIDS Conference in Vienna. "With this move we have formally removed this discrimination. There is no way we will make headway without people living with HIV playing a vital role."

Mr Sidibé underlined that restrictions that limit mobility and migration based on HIV-positive status violate human rights. There is no evidence that such restrictions prevent HIV transmission or protect public health. Furthermore, HIV-related travel restrictions have no economic justification, as people living with HIV can lead long and productive working lives. "Travel restrictions for people living with HIV serve no purpose other than to fuel stigma and discrimination," said Mr Sidibé. "I urge all other countries with such restrictions to remove them."

Last year, President Obama announced that the United States would lift its long-standing HIV-related travel restrictions, overturning a policy that had been in place since 1987. "The lifting of the HIV-specific U.S. entry ban is a sign of a renewed commitment to global health," said Dr. Howard K. Koh, Assistant Secretary for Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. "With this announcement, the U.S. looks forward to hosting the 2012 International AIDS Conference in Washington, DC."

Restricting the mobility of people living with HIV is one example of the many forms of laws, policies and practices that undermine the AIDS response. A new document launched at this week's Vienna conference by UNAIDS, the Global Network of People Living with HIV (GNP+), the International Harm Reduction Association, the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA), and the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) provides a broad "snapshot" of the legal environment related to HIV. Titled "Making the law work for the HIV response," the matrix covers over 190 countries, territories and entities, detailing whether or not a country has certain types of protective or punitive laws which either support or block the attainment of universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support.

"It is incomprehensible that HIV-related entry and residency restrictions still exist in these times," says Mr Kevin Moody, International Coordinator and CEO of GNP+.

“These restrictions are blatant violations of human rights, stimulating stigma and discrimination and actually hurting the response to the HIV epidemic.”

International AIDS Conferences and meetings have had a major influence on the reversal of HIV-specific entry and residence restrictions in recent years. The International AIDS Society will not sponsor major HIV and AIDS-focused conferences or events in a country with HIV entry restrictions.

"I'm proud of the role International AIDS Conferences and other international fora continue to play in advancing the removal of these and other laws that are counter to public health and human rights principles," said Dr Julio Montaner, President of the International AIDS Society. "HIV-specific laws and regulations on entry and residence are both overly intrusive and ineffective public health policy."

After the removal of Namibia's restrictions, UNAIDS counts 51 countries, territories, and areas that continue to impose some form of restriction on the entry, stay and residence of people living with HIV. These include restrictions that completely ban entry of HIV-positive people for any reason or length of stay; ban short stays, for example for tourism; or prevent longer stays, such as immigration, migrant work, asylum, study, international employment, or consular service.

In July 2008, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon reiterated the long-standing United Nations call for the elimination of HIV-related restrictions on entry, stay and residence. UNAIDS is closely monitoring which countries continue to employ them and has designated 2010 as the “year of equal freedom of movement for all.”

Contact:

UNAIDS | Saya Oka | tel: +41 79 514 6896