

UNAIDS and broad coalition working towards the release of nine men who have sex with men in Senegal who have been convicted and imprisoned

GENEVA, 15 January 2009 – UNAIDS deplores the arrest and imprisonment of nine members of an association called AIDES Senegal since December 22nd, 2008. On 6 January, 2009 they were tried before the court in Senegal and sentenced for acts against nature and the creation of an association of criminals. The case is currently on appeal.

A coalition bringing together organizations from civil society, the public sector and partners such as UNAIDS, UNDP, the French Embassy and the Swedish Embassy representing the European Union has been working towards the release of the detainees.

“There is no place for homophobia. Universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support must be accessible to all people in Senegal who are in need—including men who have sex with men,” said UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibé. “This will only happen if the men convicted are released and steps taken to rebuild trust with affected communities.”

Homophobia and criminalization of consensual adult sexual behaviour represent major barriers to effective responses to HIV. Such responses depend on the protection of the dignity and rights of all those affected by HIV, including their right and ability to organize and educate their communities, advocate on their behalf, and access HIV prevention and treatment services.

UNAIDS urges the Government of Senegal to take steps to eliminate stigma and discrimination faced by men who have sex with men and create an enabling legal environment for them and the organizations working with them so as to protect their rights and increase access for HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services. Failure to do so will jeopardize Senegal’s target of achieving the goal of universal access by 2010.

UNAIDS would like to see the creation of a social and legal environment that guarantees respect for human rights. UNAIDS recommends that criminal law prohibiting sexual acts between consenting adults in private should be reviewed with the aim of repeal.

UNAIDS urges the Senegalese authorities to take the necessary legal steps for the release of the nine detainees.

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UNAIDS is an innovative joint venture of the United Nations, bringing together the efforts and resources of the UNAIDS Secretariat and ten UN system organizations in the AIDS response. The Secretariat headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland—with staff on the ground in more than 80 countries. Coherent action on AIDS by the UN system is coordinated in countries through UN theme groups, and joint programmes on AIDS. UNAIDS’ Cosponsors include UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank. Visit the UNAIDS Web site at www.unaids.org