

## **UNAIDS welcomes the release of nine men in Senegal imprisoned for their sexual orientation**

SENEGAL/GENEVA, 20 April 2009 – UNAIDS welcomes the decision by Dakar’s court of appeal to release nine members of a Senegalese AIDS awareness organization, imprisoned since December 2008.

The men were sentenced in January 2009 for what the Senegalese courts termed as ‘acts against nature and the creation of an association of criminals’.

The announcement to release the men came further to an appeal supported by civil society organizations, the public sector and partners including UNAIDS, UNDP, the French Embassy and the Swedish Embassy representing the European Union, which had been working towards securing the release of the detainees since their incarceration last year.

UNAIDS had strongly urged all governments to take steps to eliminate stigma and discrimination faced by men who have sex with men and create a social and legal environment that ensures respect for human rights.

“Homophobia and criminalization based on a person’s sexual orientation is fuelling the AIDS epidemic,” said Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS. “I welcome today’s decision by the court of appeal to release these men. We urge Senegal to take steps to remove such laws that block the AIDS response.”

The rights of men who have sex with men need to be protected and stigma and discrimination addressed by amending laws that prohibit sexual acts between consenting adults in private; enforcing anti-discrimination; providing legal aid services; and promoting campaigns that address homophobia. Failure to do so will jeopardize countries abilities to achieve their goals of universal access by 2010.

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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](http://www.unaids.org)