

UNAIDS expresses concern over decision by Burundian National Assembly to criminalize same sex relations

GENEVA, 27 April 2009 – The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) is concerned and disappointed with regard to the move of Burundi's National Assembly to criminalize same sex relations.

UNAIDS was optimistic that such a law would not be passed, when in February this year, Senators in Burundi overwhelmingly rejected an amendment of the penal code that included provisions for imprisonment of people who have sexual relationships with those of the same sex.

“The decision to criminalize same sex relations is a serious setback to the AIDS response in Burundi and to the rights of those affected by the law,” said Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS. “As these discriminatory laws drive people underground, they will have a negative impact both on the delivery of HIV prevention programmes and on access to treatment for those living with HIV.”

Evidence shows that protection of the rights of men who have sex with men, lesbians and transgenders, both in law and practice, combined with scaled-up HIV programming to address their HIV and health needs are necessary and complementary components for a successful response to the epidemic.

In the 2006 United Nations *Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS*, governments committed to removing legal barriers and passing laws to protect vulnerable populations. However, over 80 countries still have legislation that prohibits same sex behaviour.

UNAIDS urges all governments to take steps to eliminate stigma and discrimination faced by men who have sex with men, lesbians and transgenders and create social and legal environments that ensure respect for human rights and universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support.

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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. The Cosponsors include UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank. Contributing to achieving global commitments to universal access to comprehensive interventions for HIV prevention, treatment, care and support is the number one priority for UNAIDS. Visit the UNAIDS Web site at www.unaids.org