

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

25 November 2009

Statement by Michel Sidibé, Executive Director

Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)

UNAIDS is fully committed to stop violence against women and girls. The response to HIV provides an opportunity to reduce intimate partner and sexual violence and develop comprehensive responses to gender-based violence and HIV prevention within and beyond the health sector.

There is strong evidence of the links between gender-based violence and HIV. According to a 2006 report by United Nations Secretary-General, one out of every three women around the world has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime, usually by someone known to her.

“We need to scale up effective programmes which promote gender equality at country level and invest more in building-up the evidence base,” said Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS. “Policies and programmes addressing gender inequality and gender-based violence will help achieve our universal targets for prevention, treatment and care. Investment in responses is an essential part of HIV programming.”

Violence and the threat of violence dramatically increase the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV by making it difficult or impossible for women to abstain from sex, to get their partners to be faithful, or to use a condom. The risk of HIV transmission increases during violent or forced-sex encounters.

Men and boys have an important role to play in promoting gender equality and community-based programmes that focus on building gender equality in relationships have been proven to be effective in reducing gender-based violence perpetration by men, victimisation of women and in reducing sexually transmitted infections.

Countries also need to address the social norms and dynamics that tolerate sexual and post-conflict violence. Comprehensive post-rape care programmes that address the mental and physical health needs of survivors must be urgently put in place.

Emergencies, particularly those involving displacement, increase HIV risk by reducing access to HIV prevention services, disrupting social support networks, increasing exposure to sexual violence, encouraging sex in return for food, shelter and other necessities, or simply by movement occurring to a higher HIV prevalence location.

On this International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women we must take action to end violence against women and ensure that women’s rights are protected.

Contact

Sophie Barton-Knott | tel. +41 22 791 1697 | bartonknotts@unaids.org

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