

UNAIDS urges all countries to respect the human rights of people most affected by HIV

Criminalization of consensual adult sexual behaviour posing serious threat to AIDS responses

Geneva, 10 December 2009 – On Human Rights Day UNAIDS is calling on all countries to uphold the human rights of people most affected by the AIDS epidemic.

Criminalization of consensual adult sexual behaviour and violation of human rights of people living with HIV are hampering HIV responses across the world. UNAIDS urges all countries to remove laws and policies that make it difficult for people to access HIV services. UNAIDS also calls upon countries to enforce laws that protect people living with and affected by HIV from discrimination.

Although important progress has been made in creating legal environments conducive for HIV prevention in many countries, UNAIDS is concerned about an apparent trend towards criminalizing consensual adult sexual behaviour.

In Uganda, for example an ‘anti-homosexuality’ bill has been proposed which if passed into law, would represent a serious setback to achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support in Uganda by driving men who have sex with men underground and away from HIV services. If passed, the bill would greatly increase stigma and discrimination against people living with and affected by HIV, as well as putting lives at risk.

"Criminalising homosexuality is an attack on the entire AIDS response," said UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibé. "It violates the human rights principals on which UNAIDS, and indeed the United Nations was founded and poses a serious setback to the AIDS response."

UNAIDS resolutely opposes discrimination against men who have sex with men and transgender people. This was one of the main issues highlighted during the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board Meeting which culminated on Human Rights Day in Geneva. The Board endorsed a proposal by the Executive Director to highlight the respect of human rights for men who have sex with men and transgender people in its core priorities and to expand comprehensive programmes aimed at reducing HIV transmission among these groups.

UNAIDS urges all countries 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, increase access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services and advance the response to the epidemic.

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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