

# MEETING REPORT

## *HIV/AIDS and Human Rights: Increased EU leadership in promoting human rights in the global response to HIV/AIDS*

On the occasion of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (December 10<sup>th</sup>) and World AIDS Day on December 1<sup>st</sup>, Stop AIDS Alliance, in collaboration with the EP Working Group on Reproductive Health, HIV/AIDS and Development (EPWG), organised a hearing at the European Parliament titled: **HIV/AIDS and Human Rights: Increased EU leadership in promoting human rights in the global response to HIV/AIDS**, on the **11<sup>th</sup> of December** hosted by the Hon. Mr. Thijs Berman, MEP (PES, NL). This event brought together programme and policy experts in three issues regarding human rights and HIV: the right to freedom from stigma and discrimination, the right to Universal Access to HIV prevention, treatment and care, and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of people living with HIV.

Speakers included civil society representatives from Africa (Burkina Faso and Burundi) and India, as well as experts in the three highlighted issues from IPPF (UK), Schorer Foundation (The Netherlands), Human Rights Watch (USA) as well as MEPs from the UK, the Netherlands, and Belgium. Closing remarks were made by **Dr. Nils Daulaire**, President & CEO of the Global Health Council (USA), **Dr. Alvaro Bermejo**, Executive Director of the International HIV/AIDS Alliance (UK) and **Mr. Louis-Charles Viossat**, French HIV/AIDS Ambassador.

**Panel 1: “The right to freedom from discrimination: the rights of People Living with HIV and AIDS” – How can the EU address and prevent stigma and discrimination of people living with HIV in its global AIDS response?**

Presentations by:

Jean Paul Yengayenge, Vice President, Observatoire des Droits des Personnes infectées et/ou affectées par le VIH/SIDA (Burundi)

Marielle Hart, Head of EU policy, Stop AIDS Alliance (Brussels)

Mr. Yengayenge’s presentation focused on the linkages between human rights and HIV in his home country of Burundi. His presentation highlighted the need for proper follow up of legal frameworks which are in place but for which proper follow-up is lacking. Stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV (PLH) still, however, pose great barriers to reaching out to PLH in order to coordinate an effective response.

*“The violation of the rights of people living with HIV has a negative effect on implementing prevention measures in the global response to the pandemic.”*

*Jean Paul Yengayenge  
Burundi*

Marielle Hart presented on the role of the EU in promoting human rights in the global HIV response. Her main message was that the EU can really make an impact if it speaks with a much stronger and collective voice in the political dialogue at the global – and country level. Her recommendations were for the EU to engage in a strong political dialogue on human rights, to support capacity building of all actors at

the country-level and to involve and support civil society at all levels of decision making.

### *Session recommendations to the EU on Stigma and Discrimination*

The EU should:

- ✂ intensify efforts to target the **key drivers** of the epidemic and in particular **the abiding harm caused by HIV-related stigma and discrimination**
- ✂ Promote the development and implementation of specific guidelines on stigma and discrimination to strengthen national health and HIV/AIDS strategies and plans, based on indicators which have been developed by civil society and HIV-positive people's networks.
- ✂ Develop and strengthen programmes to support people living with HIV and AIDS, including building their capacity to play a leading role in stigma reduction through advocacy, peer education, and involvement in policy development and decision making.

**Panel 2: "Universal Access: the right to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support for groups most affected by and most vulnerable to HIV/AIDS"** – *What can the EU do in order to ensure that these groups have access to the full range of HIV services?*

Presentations by:

Mr. Ferdinand Strijthagen, Executive Director, Schorer Foundation (NL)

Mr. Boris Dittrich, Advocacy Director, LGBT Program, Human Rights Watch (USA)

*"... Recognition of the rights of people with different sexual identities both in law and practice, combined with sufficient, scaled-up HIV programming (...) are necessary and complementary components for a successful HIV response."*

*Boris O. Dittrich  
Human Rights Watch*

Mr Strijthagen presented on the programmatic challenges in reaching out to populations key to the HIV pandemic (such as men who have sex with men, injecting drug users and sex workers),, in this case men who have sex with men.(MSM) He went on to mention that the protection of human rights, in particular the rights of such groups, is a basic and indispensable precondition for achieving access to prevention, treatment, care and support for key populations. It is also essential to acknowledge the importance of supporting southern NGOs working with these groups in advocacy, and in programme development and implementation. The EU has a significant role to play as well in stimulating and facilitating social and epidemiological research among populations key to the 'HIV pandemic. He further stressed that it is necessary not only to protect the rights of key populations, but also the rights of people who work with them.

Mr. Boris Dittrich's contribution to the meeting gave participants an overview of existing commitments, adopted by the international community, which emphasise the right to the highest attainable standard of health care, in particular for MSM and other affected groups.(Yogyakarta Principles). The presentation made clear that, regardless of the group one may identify him/herself with, the right to health remains

the same and the barriers which are faced by these communities in accessing the full range of HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services are a serious violation of this right. **Session Recommendations to the EU on Achieving Universal Access**

The EU should, in its development policies:

- ✘ Commit to longer term funding cycles and levels of funding for organisations representing high-risk and marginalised groups to learn, grow and effectively participate in (national) decision-making processes.
- ✘ Find ways to ensure coherent policies in relation to drug use, sex work, human rights and same sex behaviour, and avoid counter productive initiatives which waste effort and money and only add to the burdens of disadvantage and ill health of high-risk and marginalised groups.
- ✘ Scale up measures which include interventions to integrate community health workers in health systems strengthening efforts to effectively provide services to high-risk and marginalised groups.

**Panel 3: “The Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of people living with HIV” – How can the EU ensure that the SRHR of people living with HIV are adequately addressed in their global response to HIV/AIDS?**

Presentations by:

Ms. Reine Lydia Saloucou, director, Initiative Privée Communautaire contre le VIH (Burkina Faso)

Mr. Kevin Osborne, Senior HIV/AIDS Adviser, IPPF (UK)

Ms Saloucou began the panel discussion with highlighting the linkages between sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and HIV/AIDS. She went on to stress the need for comprehensive SRHR services, in particular for PLH, as they often do not receive adequately focused services. She stressed the importance of empowerment, in particular for women, with regards to SRHR services.

Kevin Osborne’s presentation emphasised the importance of gathering solid evidence. He went on to articulate key messages on the right to reproduction, sexuality and desire, in particular for PLH. He stressed that safer and responsible sexual behaviour is the responsibility of all partners, regardless of status. At the EU level, Mr. Osborne stressed the following action points: promotion of good practices on decriminalisation of HIV among the EU countries; scaling up towards universal access, especially for vulnerable groups; and ensuring the rights of PLH within broader policies, such as workplace policies.

*“Understanding and addressing the specific sexual and reproductive health needs of HIV positive people is an important part of linking prevention and treatment”*

*Christo Greyling, a father living with HIV, South Africa*

## *Session Recommendations to the EU on the SRHR of PLHIV*

The EU was called upon to:

- ✘ Support SRHR and HIV linkages at the policy, systems and service levels to improve health outcomes.
- ✘ Develop, adopt, modify and strengthen relevant policies for linking SRHR and HIV/AIDS in strategic plans and coordination mechanisms at the country level.
- ✘ Create a supportive policy environment to ensure the implementation of a collective human rights and gender-sensitive approach to SRHR and HIV linkages.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Concluding remarks were made by Dr. Nils Daulaire, Mr. Louis-Charles Viossat and Dr. Alvaro Bermejo.

Mr. Viossat, the French Ambassador for HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases, stressed the importance of lifting of HIV travel restrictions, since it is not a public health risk, especially with the new treatments that are available. Within the framework of addressing the linkages between human rights and HIV, he noted that stigma and discrimination are key to the response. He noted that although there are many situations where legislation protects the rights of PLH, there are still gaps in implementing these. Even with the current funding for the HIV/AIDS response, there is still a large disparity for funds which are available for groups most affected and vulnerable to HIV. He concluded by stressing the important role that the EU can play in the global response to the pandemic. The EU must take on a leadership role and lead by example.

Dr. Daulaire continued the discussions on travel restrictions by mentioning the potential lift of the travel restrictions into the USA under the new Obama administration. He continued to highlight that the continuing debate on care versus prevention must not be perceived as such, but rather to acknowledge the inextricable links between the right to care – which is a subset of the Universal Access commitments – and the right to protection. It is key to protect all groups, and each and every group deserves special attention and targeted prevention and outreach methods.

Dr. Bermejo furthered this discussion by stressing how HIV infection fuels human rights violations, and vice versa. Over the years, the response has been difficult to organise: human rights groups have been too busy fighting for the rights of PLH to even acknowledge or implement AIDS programming, while the two of these are linked. He therefore recommended that the EU use existing frameworks to strengthen the link between human rights and the global response to the pandemic.