

Brussels, 7 November 2007

Civil society input for the EU World AIDS Day Statement

Currently, 40 million people are living with HIV and infection levels still rise. This is largely due to the **exceptional nature** of the pandemic. AIDS touches on the **taboos** of many societies, allowing HIV to affect in particular **vulnerable groups** in society, such as women young people, in particular girls, sex workers, injecting drug users, men who have sex with men, and people living with HIV and AIDS.

There is no lack of political commitment to the AIDS response.¹ Starting with the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS in 2001, HIV/AIDS has increasingly received the political commitment it so desperately needs. On June 2006, the UN General Assembly made a new commitment towards the goal of **universal access to comprehensive HIV prevention programmes, treatment, care and support by 2010**². This commitment includes agreement to increase efforts to tackle the major obstacles to scaling up to universal access, including **lack of respect for human rights and stigma and discrimination**. This was reiterated in this year's Bremen Declaration.³

The fear of HIV-related stigma and discrimination prevents people from taking up vital opportunities for HIV testing and treatment services, thereby **intensifying poverty** and social exclusion. It also leads people living with HIV/AIDS to neglect their **sexual and reproductive health (SRH)** putting them at further risks for themselves (other STIs, re-infection) and for their partners (and potentially their children through mother to child transmission). Many of the populations being highly vulnerable to HIV, such as the groups mentioned above, also endure **additional stigma and discrimination** due to their behaviour or social status. HIV/AIDS has served only to reinforce existing prejudices, inequalities and abuses of human rights affecting these groups.⁴

“One day a doctor expressed his dissatisfaction with me: he used very rude words. That was the day I went to get antiretrovirals. He told me to sit far away from him.” *Chet Tol, Cambodia*

As there are currently no specific programmes combating HIV-related stigma and discrimination globally⁵, we urge the European Union to abide to this year's World AIDS Day theme and take **a leadership role** in addressing this issue through enhanced cooperation efforts at all levels (institutionally, nationally and globally) and political dialogue.

¹ However, the pandemic still faces an enormous funding gap. Recent UNAIDS estimates indicate that US\$ 58 billion will be required to achieve Universal Access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support

² See paragraph 49 of the United Nations General Assembly Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS

³ The Bremen Declaration on Responsibility and Partnership – Together Against HIV/AIDS, was adopted on 13 March 2007. Paragraph 12 states: “to respect, act, and when necessary, legislate to promote and guarantee the human rights, including fighting stigma and discrimination, especially of people living with HIV/AIDS and those affected most by the epidemic in Europe and the neighbouring countries: people who inject drugs, men who have sex with men, young people, women, migrants, children, people in prisons, men and women involved in prostitution.”

⁴ Globally only 5% of injecting drug users, 11% of men who have sex with men and 16% of sex workers have access to basic HIV services.

⁵ “Since the beginning of the epidemic, stigma, discrimination, and gender equality have been identified... as major obstacles to effective responses to HIV. Yet there has never been serious political and programmatic commitment to doing anything about them.” Peter Piot, Executive Director, UNAIDS, XVI International AIDS Conference, Toronto 2006

The EU should also strongly encourage programmes **to support communities** affected by HIV and AIDS, by building their capacity to play **a leading role** in stigma reduction through advocacy, peer education, and involvement in policy development and decision making. Other measures could include promoting behaviour change among health service providers, strong linkages between HIV and SRH services⁶, promoting youth friendly services to increase access to testing and treatment for young people, strong awareness raising on the “taboo” themes leading to stigma (sexuality, drug use, gender inequality..) in education programmes and setting up of strong HIV workplace policies.

The EU **World AIDS Day Statement** offers a **key political opportunity** to promote the development of specific measures **to combat HIV-related stigma and discrimination**. Universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support can only be achieved if the **vital role of people living with HIV and AIDS**⁷ and other vulnerable groups in combating stigma and discrimination is fully recognised and supported.

Yours sincerely,

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German Foundation for World Population (DSW) Brussels
International Planned Parenthood Federation – European Network

“I could feel how many more people in the community had stories that were deep in them. But they had no place or chance to speak out.”
Christopher, Tanzania, at a Kimara Peer Educators’ anti stigma workshop.

⁶ Open and accessible SRH services are key not only for recognising the SRH needs and rights of people living with HIV, but also contribute to avoiding marginalisation).

⁷ According to the GIPA principle: This is the Greater Involvement of People living with HIV and AIDS principle, which is the backbone of many interventions worldwide and is critical to ethical and effective national responses to the pandemic.