

World AIDS Day Statement 2009 from UN Plus

Today communities around world will remember the millions who have died of AIDS and speak out in solidarity with those living with HIV. While many of us, thanks to access to treatment, are able to lead full and productive lives, the global response is still not meeting the needs of the vast majority of those living with HIV. Of the almost 10 million people living with HIV in need of treatment, only around 4 million have access, and availability of second and third line therapies is still a challenge.

Aside from the medial and scientific hurdles that must still be overcome, we continue to face enormous socio-cultural, political, legal and economic challenges to an effective and universal AIDS response. Of particular concern this year, we witnessed a growing trend towards criminalization of transmission in many countries as well as the introduction of legislation against men who have sex with men. In some parts of the world governments have demonstrated a lack of willingness to support life-saving harm reduction initiatives and in November the World Health Organization announced that AIDS is the leading cause of death of women between the ages of 14 and 44.

Nonetheless, we have seen progress during the last twelve months. Countries have reported that with increasing treatment availability people are living longer and fewer are dying from AIDS related illnesses. The United States of America finally announced the removal of entry restrictions for people living with HIV and we hope that other countries will do the same in the year to come. In India, the longstanding anti-sodomy law - Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code - was repealed, paving the way for better legal protection for men who have sex with men and transgendered people. At its 98th session in June 2009, the International Labour Conference held the first of two tripartite discussions to develop a new international labour standard on AIDS and the world of work. It is expected to be adopted in June 2010 and focuses on prevention and the elimination of discrimination on the basis of HIV status.

During 2009, we witnessed the leadership and advocacy of the UN Secretary-General through his outspoken support for the rights of people living with HIV and those most at risk, including people who use drugs, women, sex workers, men who have sex with men. Networks of people living with HIV around the world began to implement the People Living with HIV Stigma Index, which will assist our communities to monitor and respond to the stigma and discrimination we experience. In recent days, results of the Index have been launched in China and the UK, with the participation of high level government officials. At an international consultation in Tunisia earlier this year, and during several follow-up meetings, people living with HIV came together to reclaim and redefine the 'positive prevention' agenda as 'Positive Health Dignity and Prevention'. Meanwhile, others have reaffirmed the important links between treatment and prevention.

In 2009, membership of UN Plus has grown to 170 members, representing 28 UN entities and 43 countries. We launched our local presence in South Africa, Lesotho, Mozambique and Swaziland. It is clear that stigma and discrimination remain the greatest barriers to effective and comprehensive prevention, treatment, care and support, including within the UN. We are convinced that the meaningful participation of people living with HIV is crucial in overcoming such barriers and that our role in the development, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of AIDS-related programmes and policies must be a non-negotiable. As UN staff living with HIV, we are committed to focusing our efforts towards the rapid

achievement of Universal Access and we wish you all the best for your own efforts towards this goal in the coming year.

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