



For Immediate Release
20 July 2010

GLOBAL HEALTH LEADERS SPEAK OUT ON THE INTERCONNECTED CRISES OF HIV AND DISCRIMINATION AMONG GAY MEN AT AIDS 2010

(Vienna, Austria) -- Leading figures in the global AIDS response meeting here are focusing on rapidly increasing rates of HIV among gay men and other men who have sex with men (MSM) and on the pressing need to promote broad access to HIV prevention, treatment and care for MSM worldwide. A media briefing at the AIDS 2010 conference, to be held on Tuesday, 20 July at 1 pm, will report on strategies to reverse the stigma, discrimination, human rights abuses and lack of targeted services that are leading to rapidly increasing HIV infection rates among MSM. The impact of the epidemic on MSM worldwide was documented and analyzed here as part of a highly successful day-long symposium, "BE HEARD," hosted by the Global Forum on MSM & HIV (MSMGF).

The breadth of participants expected at Tuesday's press conference indicates that HIV among MSM is no longer viewed as either a small or isolated problem, but rather as a major driver of the global epidemic. MSM in low- and middle-income countries are 19 times more likely to be infected with HIV than the general population, yet only one in five has access to the HIV prevention, care and treatment services they need.

Press conference speakers outlining the need for greatly improved responses to the impact of HIV on MSM will include Elly Katabira (President-Elect of the International AIDS Society [IAS]), Stephen Lewis (Co-Director of AIDS-Free World); Paul DeLay (Deputy Executive Director of UNAIDS); George Ayala (Executive Officer of the MSMGF); Gift Trapence (Director of the Centre for the Development of People, Malawi [CEDEP]); Joel Nana (Executive Director of the African Men for Sexual Health and Rights [AMSHer]); and prominent Moroccan AIDS activist Othman Mellouk.

"Discrimination against MSM is not limited to any one area of the world, and the failure to respect the human rights of MSM and to integrate MSM communities into evidence-based HIV prevention efforts is a driver of the epidemic in every global region," said incoming International AIDS Society (IAS) President Elly Katabira. "In many parts of the world, MSM are the group most impacted by HIV. Even where the epidemic is predominantly heterosexual, however, MSM bear a large but often overlooked share of the HIV burden."

The recently unveiled Strategic Plan of the IAS calls for the scale up HIV prevention for men who have sex with men, removal of laws criminalizing homosexuality and advocacy to ensure that governments and bodies such as National AIDS Commissions fund and provide HIV-related services for MSM.

"When MSM are involved in AIDS responses, HIV rates decline," said George Ayala, Executive Officer of the Global Forum on MSM and HIV (MSMGF). "When MSM are ignored or stigmatized, HIV transmission in MSM communities increases. Respecting the human rights of MSM is not only the right and just thing to do - it is also an essential piece of good public health policy that can significantly reduce the size and impact of this epidemic."

Tuesday's press conference will report key findings from a day-long pre-conference, BE HEARD, which featured more than 100 of the world's top experts on human rights and HIV among sexual minorities and involved more than 500 attendees from 80 countries. BE HEARD highlighted a wide array of pressing health and human rights issues facing sexual minorities, including the spread of HIV among MSM in low- and middle-income countries, criminalization of homosexuality and the potential impact of new biomedical approaches to HIV prevention. MSMGF launched the biennial International AIDS Conference pre-conference in 2004 in response to the need for much greater attention to MSM health and human rights issues at both local and international levels.

WHAT: PRESS CONFERENCE, "Be Heard: Elevating Issues Concerning MSM, HIV and Human Rights"

WHEN: Tuesday, 20 July, 1:00 - 2:00 pm

WHERE: AIDS 2010 Media Center Press Conference Room 1

About the MSMGF

The Global Forum on MSM & HIV (MSMGF) is an expanding network of AIDS organizations, MSM networks, and advocates committed to ensuring robust coverage of and equitable access to effective HIV prevention, care, treatment, and support services tailored to the needs of gay men and other MSM. Guided by a Steering Committee of 20 members from 17 countries situated mainly in the Global South, and with administrative and fiscal support from AIDS Project Los Angeles (APLA), the MSMGF works to promote MSM health and human rights worldwide through advocacy, information exchange, knowledge production, networking, and capacity building.

About the IAS:

The International AIDS Society (IAS) is the world's leading independent association of HIV professionals, with 14,000 members from 190 countries working at all levels of the global response to AIDS. Our members include researchers from all disciplines, clinicians, public health and community practitioners on the frontlines of the epidemic, as well as policy and programme planners. The IAS is the custodian of the biennial International AIDS Conference, which will be held in Vienna, Austria from 18 to 23 July 2010.

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