



PRESS RELEASE

Civil Society supports UN Member States to set new AIDS agenda

New York, 8 April 2011—More than 400 civil society representatives have come together at the United Nations in New York for a one-day hearing on progress made in the HIV response. The event is an opportunity for United Nations Member States to engage with civil society representatives and people living with HIV to highlight some of the challenges, achievements and aspirations in the AIDS response and find new ways of moving forward.

The hearing is being held as UN Member States begin consultation on the drafting of a new outcome document on HIV, to be adopted at a United Nations High Level Meeting on AIDS in June.

At the 2006 High Level Meeting on AIDS, countries set goals towards achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. Although great strides have been made in the response since that time, not all countries have reached their universal access targets.

At the hearing civil society organizations highlighted the need for a strong new declaration, rejuvenated political commitment and revitalized targets to ensure countries scale-up to reach their universal access goals.

The President of the General Assembly, Joseph Deiss, who chaired the hearing said, “Civil society was the first to sound the alarm bells on AIDS in the 1980’s and their passion and resolve have not diminished today. Civil society’s voice remains as powerful as ever before and they are making every effort to support Member States in producing a strong and meaningful declaration on AIDS in June.”

The President’s report from the hearing, which will be issued as an official General Assembly document, will be instrumental in informing consultations in the lead up to the June Meeting.

“It is essential for the future success of the AIDS response that civil society is fully involved,” said Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS. “Civil society has a unique ability to build bridges and create links between partners. Member States have a valuable opportunity today to learn from the people who are most affected by the epidemic and find new ways of working together to make a real difference.”

Civil society representatives highlighted the need for sustainability over the long term. “It is encouraging that there is more commitment now from governments and donors to programmes to prevent vertical transmission of HIV,” said Ebony Johnson, North American Delegate, UNAIDS PCB NGO Delegation. “But this commitment must be extended to support people for the whole of their lifetimes to make sure that they have

continued access to robust and sustainable HIV prevention, treatment and support services.”

Many of the issues and concerns raised by civil society organizations at the hearing were centered on increasing access to HIV services. Major obstacles outlined included legal and policy barriers; stigma and discrimination; the need for laws to protect human rights, including the rights of people living HIV; and social justice for equity in access to services

“The legal and policy environment must be reformed to increase the availability and uptake of services by people most affected by the epidemic,” said Joel Nana, Executive Director of African Men for Sexual Health and Rights. “It is essential that the right to access services is upheld regardless of sexual orientation, sexual practices or legal status.”

Civil society members also stressed the importance of fostering dialogue between communities and constituencies. They highlighted that dialogue between women’s groups, young people, people of different faiths and cultures, and marginalized groups is essential to reduce stigma and discrimination and remove barriers to scaling-up the response.

Another area civil society representatives focused on during the hearing was the urgent need to mobilize resources and strengthen communities through greater investment. In addition they underscored the need to form strategic partnerships between communities, governments, the private sector, trade unions and international organizations for a stronger, more comprehensive response to the epidemic.

The United Nations General Assembly High Level Meeting on AIDS will be held from the 8-10 June in New York. More information can be found online at:

www.unaids.org/en/aboutunaids/unitednationsdeclarationsandgoals/2011highlevelmeetingon aids/

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