

PRESS STATEMENT

UNAIDS calls on governments to stop arbitrary and discriminatory arrests of LGBTI people and to protect their human rights

GENEVA, 15 May 2020— Ahead of the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOT), on 17 May, UNAIDS is calling on governments to immediately stop arbitrary and discriminatory arrests of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people based on their sexual orientation or gender identity and to enact laws to protect their human rights.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been news reports of murders of transgender people in Puerto Rico, arrests of LGBTI people in Egypt, the United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda and increasing violence and abuse in Cameroon and the Republic of Korea.

“Arbitrary and discriminatory arrests and harassment of LGBTI people must stop,” said Winnie Byanyima, UNAIDS Executive Director. “The COVID-19 crisis has exposed and exacerbated the inequality, violence and abuse that LGBTI people face every day. We need to break the silence against these draconian laws, which only serve to further marginalize people,” she added.

As of December 2019, more than 70 countries criminalize same-sex sexual behaviour. Under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, governments have a moral and legal obligation to remove those laws and to enact laws that protect people from discrimination.

A few weeks ago, UNAIDS and MPact released a 12-point [plan](#) to uphold the human rights of LGBTI people and ensure their inclusion in COVID-19 response strategies.

Globally, gay men and other men who have sex with men are 27 times more likely to be living with HIV than the general population. It is estimated that gay men and other men who have sex with men accounted for 18% of new HIV infections worldwide in 2017. Meanwhile, transgender women are 12 times more likely to acquire HIV than all adults of reproductive age. It is estimated that 0.1–1.1% of the global population is transgender and that 16.5% of transgender women are living with HIV.

IDAHOT, a worldwide celebration of sexual and gender diversity, has chosen the theme “Breaking the silence” for 2020 to commemorate the World Health Organization’s decision in 1990 to declassify homosexuality as a mental disorder.

The day represents a major global annual landmark to draw the attention of decision-makers, the media, the public, corporations, opinion leaders and local authorities to the alarming situation faced by people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities or expressions and sexual characteristics.

“We need solidarity to save lives and we need to help build healthy communities and societies so they can respond to HIV, COVID-19 and the next pandemic,” Ms Byanyima added.

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UNAIDS

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) leads and inspires the world to achieve its shared vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. UNAIDS unites the efforts of 11 UN organizations—UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, UN Women, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank—and works closely with global and national partners towards ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals. Learn more at unaids.org and connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.