

TALKING POINTS

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BY: Jan Beagle, Deputy Executive Director of UNAIDS

DATE: 17 July 2010

PLACE: Reed Messe room, Mini room 2, IAC, Vienna

OCCASION: Workplace Partners Forum

Subject: The role of the workplace in providing universal access to prevention, treatment, care and support

Distinguished guests,,

I am delighted to be here with you this morning.

The United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS I represent is a Joint Programme which brings together the efforts and resources of ten UN system organizations and the Secretariat in the AIDS response. UNAIDS 's vision is: **zero new infections. zero discrimination. zero AIDS-related deaths.**

Firstly I would like to emphasize how pleased UNAIDS is that Governments, employers and workers at its 99th Session of the International Labour Conference, adopted a comprehensive new international labour standard on HIV and AIDS and the world of work. I was privileged to speak at the Conference in support of the adoption of the Recommendation which marks a significant milestone in the response to the HIV pandemic.

As highlighted by Dr. Sophia Kisting, Director of the ILO Programme on HIV/AIDS, the Recommendation is the first international human rights instrument focussed on HIV and AIDS and the world of work.

I would like to share with you some thoughts as to why the workplace is so critical to achieve universal access to prevention, treatment, care and support, and **on the importance of the ILO Recommendation for UNAIDS.**

The new standard fits well within the UNAIDS Outcome Framework (2009 – 2011) which provides the framework for intensified UN family action on HIV around ten priority areas to accelerate efforts towards universal access and to contribute to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. These priority areas have been selected based on a series of consultations with the UNAIDS Cosponsors, including ILO, communities, civil society and a broad range of other stakeholders:

- We can **reduce sexual transmission of HIV**
- We can prevent **mothers from dying and babies from becoming infected with HIV**
- We can ensure that people living with HIV receive **treatment**
- We can prevent people living with HIV from dying of **tuberculosis**
- We can protect **drug users** from becoming infected with HIV
- We can empower **men who have sex with men, sex workers and transgender people** to protect themselves from HIV infection and to fully access antiretroviral therapy
- We can remove **punitive laws, policies, practices, stigma and discrimination** that block effective response to AIDS
- We can meet the HIV needs of **women and girls** and can stop sexual and gender-based violence
- We can empower **young people** to protect themselves from HIV
- We can enhance **social protection** for people affected by HIV

The Recommendation is an invaluable instrument to meet UNAIDS' priorities, most prominently: 1) the removal of punitive laws, policies, practices, stigma and discrimination that block effective responses to AIDS and 2) the enhancement of social protection for people affected by HIV.

Why? Because

- The Recommendation **strikes a balance between the development of national HIV/AIDS legislation and policies to create an enabling and conducive environment and specific targeted action which focuses on vulnerable groups and at-risk populations.**
- **It has some very specific provisions in the area of social protection.** For example, it calls upon governments to ensure that all workers and their dependents have full access to health care, whether this is provided under public health, social security systems or private insurance or other schemes. It states that there should be no discrimination against workers or their dependants based on their real or perceived HIV status in access to social security schemes and occupational insurance schemes, or in relation to benefits under such schemes, including for health care and disability, and death and survivors benefits. It specifically calls on governments to consider extending support in periods of employment and unemployment, including where necessary, income-generating opportunities for PLHIV or persons affected by HIV or AIDS.
- **It recognizes the importance of gender equality in the workplace** and calls for measures to promote the empowerment of women, as well as the active participation of both men and women in workplace programmes.
- It acknowledges that HIV and AIDS has a more severe impact on vulnerable and most at risk populations and **underscores the need to specifically target key populations and focus on workers of all sexual orientations.** It also makes specific provision for occupational transmission of HIV, as well as the heightened protection of workers who are at particularly high risk of exposure to HIV.

The Recommendation will strengthen workplace programs around the world.

We are all aware that HIV affects the most economically active age range in every population and the majority of the 33.4 million people estimated to be living with HIV worldwide are workers. Many are still subject to stigma and discrimination and some to threat, or reality, of losing their jobs due to their status. AIDS is a workplace issue not only because it affects labour and productivity, but also because the workplace has a vital role to play in the wider struggles to limit the spread and effects of the epidemic. The workplace provides unique entry points to reaching people where they spend the most time in their daily lives.

On workplace programmes, the United Nations has to lead by example!

Building on the ILO's Code of Practice in the World of Work, in 2008 the UN system created a single workplace programme, called **UN Cares**, which revolves around 4 key themes:

- creating awareness about and educating employees on HIV,
- eliminating HIV-related stigma and discrimination,
- ensuring access to HIV-related commodities and services such as male and female condoms, voluntary counselling and testing and post-exposure prophylaxis and
- garnering managerial support.

Leadership and managerial support for UN Cares have been key for its successful implementation, starting with the strong commitment of the UN Secretary General, as well as support from the agency heads, and Resident Coordinators at the country level.

Keys to the success of UN Cares are:

- The provision of a management structure and the necessary funding across agencies. This is done through a global interagency team that

reports through the directors of human resources in the UN system and up to the High Level Committee on Management, composed of deputy directors of the agencies, including myself;

- Support of relevant workplace policies, such as work-life balance and sound staff health insurance coverage.
- Trained people at the country level who understand UN Cares and who can lead its implementation under the leadership of the UN country teams
- Tools to facilitate implementation, such as a booklet called “Living in a World with HIV” for all employees and available in 6 official languages as well as a number of local languages, a UN Cares website, posters, videos and much more.
- Close collaboration between the UN group of HIV positive staff members, UN Plus, as partners in this effort
- Proper monitoring and evaluation of the program

Today, surveys have indicated that 60% of UN staff around the world are aware of HIV-related workplace policies, 86% of countries where the UN is present have had learning events on HIV, 78% of offices report making available male condoms in the workplace and 40% offer female condoms as well. Results are encouraging, we must do better.

We are also beginning to see the results beyond our own UN workplace. For example, in Mozambique, the UN Cares team has recently been invited to help the country's Parliament implement a similar programme for its workforce. This supports the Secretary General's vision of making UN Cares a model workplace programme for others to emulate.

How can you help?

As representatives of your constituencies, you can advocate for the implementation of legislation that protects human rights and advances effective HIV programmes. You can help to unlock the political, legal and institutional barriers that increase people's vulnerability to infection and hinder people living with HIV from accessing the services that they need to survive.

You can use your collective strengths and voices to make a real contribution to implementation of the ILO Standard. Join forces, share expertise and, experiences – we can build a global partnership network to implement the new international labour standard on HIV/AIDS and the world of work.

The workplace is a crucial entry-point and an important strategic partner in our efforts to achieve UNAIDS new ambitious vision. A people-centred approach to achieve the UNAIDS' vision cannot be achieved without robust and targeted workplace programmes and policies. It cannot be achieved without the full engagement of all partners, particularly people living with HIV, international, national and local organisations, governments, employers and workers.

I wish you a productive Workplace Partners Forum.

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Leveraging the AIDS response, UNAIDS works to build political action and to promote the rights all of people for better results for global health and development. Globally, it sets policy and is the source of HIV-related data. In countries, UNAIDS brings together the resources of the UNAIDS Secretariat and 10 UN system organizations for coordinated and accountable efforts to unite the world against AIDS. www.unaids.org.