





ZERO DISCRIMINATION

Lorena Castillo de Varela, First Lady of Panama, has demonstrated a strong commitment to humanitarian and social causes. A mother of three, she devotes part of her life to strengthening social solidarity and the family. In her role as Special Advocate for AIDS in Latin America, Ms Castillo de Varela is inspiring and supporting individuals, communities and leaders to stand up for zero discrimination.

Thirty-five years after the start of the AIDS epidemic, discrimination against people living with HIV and other key populations is still a reality. Stigma and discrimination affect millions of people around the world, reducing their capacity to participate fully and significantly in society, be it at work, at school or in their communities.

UNAIDS sponsors the global zero discrimination campaign, which calls on everyone to take action against discrimination. Everyone has a role to play: stand up and speak up when something is wrong or someone is treated unfairly, raise awareness, support people who have been discriminated against and promote the benefits of diversity.

As part of the zero discrimination campaign, Ms Castillo de Varela will raise awareness and action around zero discrimination and issues to empower people to access life-saving services.

DID YOU KNOW?

Ms Castillo de Varela has worked in television in Panama and as a news correspondent at the White House, the United Nations, the Organization of American States and the Vatican.

Q&A WITH THE FIRST LADY OF PANAMA

What made you choose zero discrimination as part of your platform?

In my role as First Lady I have been to all corners of Panama and have seen the progress of communities when they have access to services, and I've seen what happens when people are left behind. Today, there is nothing that justifies stigma and discrimination. I want to use my role as UNAIDS Special Advocate to celebrate diversity and to help to ensure that all people can live with dignity.



The butterfly, which represents transformation, is the symbol for Zero Discrimination Day. What does the call for transformation mean to you?

We all have the right to be who we are with respect for our diversity. It is outrageous that, with all the tools available to end the AIDS epidemic, in 2017 we find prejudice, exclusion and criminalization not only in homes but in the streets, hospitals, police-stations, courtrooms...To me, the respect, promotion and protection for human rights are essential conditions for achieving sustainable development. I am working tirelessly with a mission of breaking the silence to reach every corner of Latin America and further with a message of inclusion, solidarity, peace and respect. The call for transformation is a call to each and every one of us to be the transformation that you want to see in the world....

ENDING AIDS IS ABOUT SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

A central principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is to "ensure that no one is left behind" and to "reach the furthest behind first". Discrimination continues to undermine efforts to achieve a more just and equitable world and causes pain and suffering for many. It is a major barrier to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and continues to undermine public health generally and the AIDS response specifically.

Discrimination has many forms, from racial or religious discrimination to discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation or age, and to bullying at school or at work. It is rarely linked solely to one characteristic of a person. It is often fuelled by multiple factors, referred to as intersectional, multiple or compounded discrimination. Too often, people at higher risk of HIV infection face multiple forms of discrimination.

Women living with HIV often experience discriminatory practices in reproductive health-care settings. For example, pregnancy-related discrimination is frequently reported by women, including advice not to have children, inappropriate treatment or failure to provide care during labour, and forced or coerced sterilization of women living with HIV. This type of discrimination can have particularly profound effects on women's health and efforts to eliminate mother-to-child transmission of HIV, because women who have faced HIV-related stigma and discrimination are less likely to access pre- and post-natal treatment and care.

Throughout the world, stigma, discrimination, exclusion and inequality continue to make people vulnerable to HIV and hinder their access to HIV prevention, treatment and care services. To achieve our goal of ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030, we need laws and policies that protect rather than punish, combined with programmes that reduce stigma and discrimination. Our journey to end AIDS must be one of social transformation.

37.7% OF WOMEN LIVING WITH HIV SURVEYED IN A SIX-COUNTRY SURVEY IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION HAVE REPORTED BEING SUBJECTED TO INVOLUNTARY STERILIZATION.

IN ONLY THREE OUT OF 10 COUNTRIES WORLDWIDE

DO EQUAL NUMBERS OF GIRLS AND BOYS ATTEND

UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL.

DATA FROM 50 COUNTRIES FROM THE PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV STIGMA INDEX SHOW THAT ONE IN EIGHT PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV REPORT BEING DENIED HEALTH CARE.

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES ARE 1.3 TIMES MORE
LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE SEXUAL, PHYSICAL AND
EMOTIONAL VIOLENCE THAN THEIR PEERS WITHOUT
DISABILITIES RENDERING THEM VULNERABLE TO HIV.



