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# High-Level Meeting on AIDS

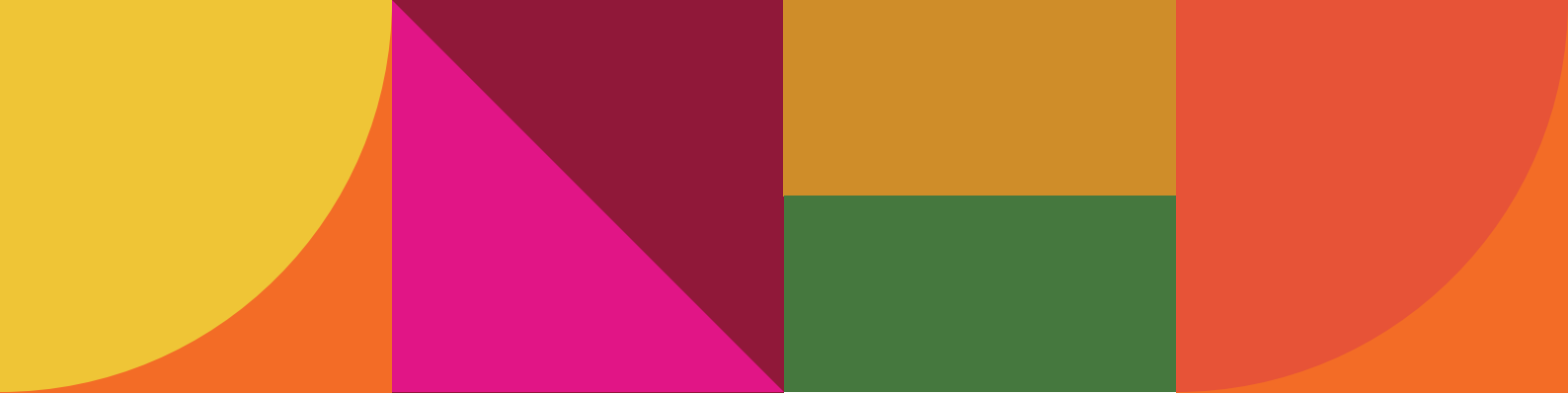
## END INEQUALITIES. END AIDS.

# ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS IN ADDRESSING INEQUALITIES TO END AIDS BY 2030

REMARKS BY WINNIE BYANYIMA  
UNAIDS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

HLM SIDE EVENT  
7 JUNE 2021

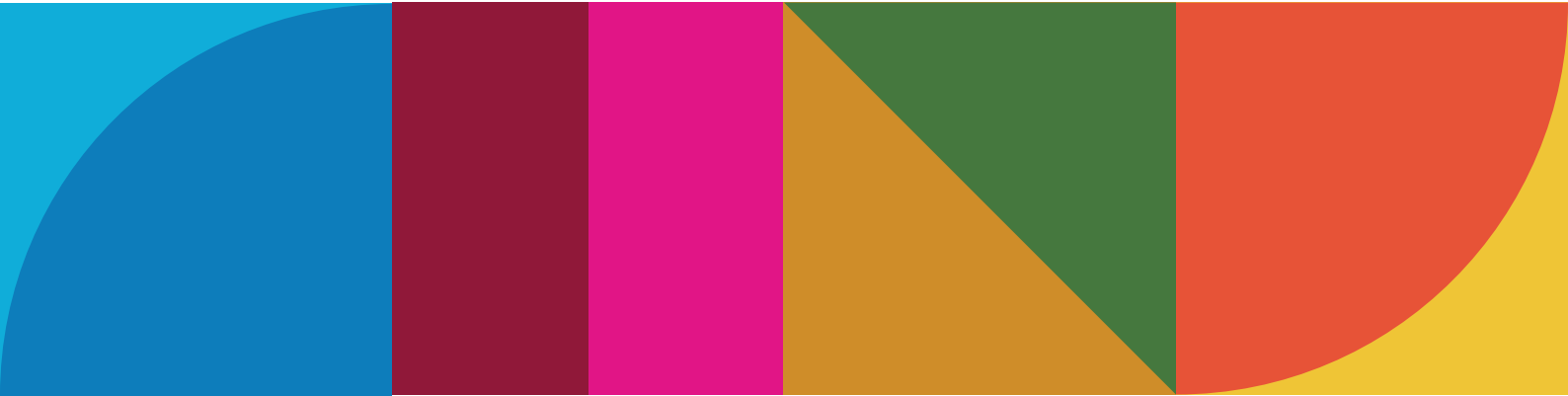
#HLM2021AIDS



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PARLIAMENTS AND PARLIAMENTARIANS HAVE A CRITICAL ROLE TO PLAY IN THIS FIGHT TO END AIDS AND UPHOLD THE RIGHT TO HEALTH FOR ALL PEOPLE WITHOUT DISCRIMINATION. YOU PARLIAMENTARIANS ARE CHAMPIONS OF THE PEOPLE. YOU HAVE THE POWER TO SHAPE BUDGETS AND BUDGET DECISIONS. YOU INFLUENCE BUDGETARY DECISIONS FOR HIV AND HEALTH THROUGHOUT THE BUDGET CYCLE. YOU VOTE AND ADOPT LAWS THAT PROMOTE HUMAN RIGHTS OF ALL CITIZENS INCLUDING THEIR RIGHT TO HEALTH. YOU PLAY A CRUCIAL ROLE AS GUARDIANS OF DEMOCRATIC VALUES AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS, AND YOUR ROLE IS SO IMPORTANT IN STRENGTHENING PUBLIC TRUST. YOU ALSO TAKE US FROM TALK AND WORDS INTO ACTION BY THE POWER YOU HAVE.

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Thank you, Madam Chair, honourable parliamentarians, colleagues, friends. Let me first of all thank IPU and the Secretary General Martin Chungong for the close collaboration with UNAIDS and for organising this very important side-event on the role of parliamentarians in addressing the inequalities that drive HIV.

I would also like to thank the IPU Advisory Group on Health and the IPU Governing Council for adopting the statement on HIV and AIDS on the occasion of this High-Level Meeting, which will add political weight to the outcome of the HLM and to the Political Declaration.

It's 20 years since the first UN General Assembly Special Session and 40 years since the first cases of AIDS were reported. In this important year, we also mark 25 years since the world came together and established the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) which I have the honour to lead.


AIDS is one of the deadliest pandemics of modern times. Since the start of the epidemic 77.5 million people have become infected with HIV and we have lost 34.7 million people who have died of AIDS.

But in the past 40 years, we have made huge progress in turning the epidemic around. The world came together- scientists came together, governments came together, movements of activists came together.

Today, 75% of all people living with HIV are now on treatment- living healthy lives. That's 27.4 million people, on treatment, today. We have reduced AIDS deaths by 43% in the last ten years. Progress, however is slower in reducing new HIV infections which declined by just 30% in the last 10 years. We need to do more.

In 2016, at the last High-Level-Meeting on AIDS countries set ambitious targets to meet by 2020 to put them on a path to end AIDS by 2030. However, these global targets were missed. If you unpack the data, we see that some countries did achieve the targets- small, landlocked developing countries like Eswatini. So the targets were achievable.

COVID-19 threatens to blow us further off course as the world fights the two colliding pandemics of HIV and COVID-19.



Parliaments and parliamentarians have a critical role to play in this fight to end AIDS and uphold the right to health for all people without discrimination. You parliamentarians are champions of the people. Nothing makes me happier than speaking with you. I was elected three times in Uganda and was humbled to service my community.

You have the power to shape budgets and budget decisions. You influence budgetary decisions for HIV and health throughout the budget cycle.

You vote and adopt laws that promote human rights of all citizens including their right to health.

You play a crucial role as guardians of democratic values and fundamental freedoms, and your role is so important in strengthening public trust.

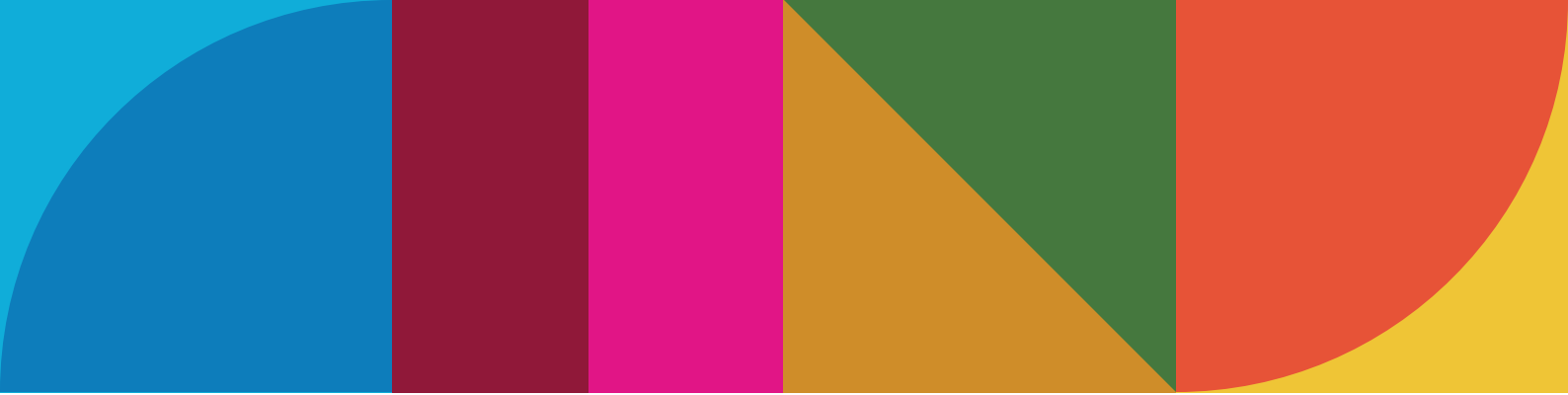
You also take us from talk and words into action by the power you have.

We know that countries that have progressive laws and policies and strong and inclusive health systems have the best outcomes against HIV. They are the countries that have achieved or exceeded the 2020 targets set by the United Nations General Assembly in 2016.

We also know that countries with punitive laws that do not take a rights-based approach to health, that sell health as if it is a pair of shoes- a commodity, punish, ignore, stigmatize and leave key populations—which make up 62% of new HIV infections worldwide—on the margins. These countries were not able to achieve the 2020 goals.

Young women in sub-Saharan Africa also continue to be left behind. Six out of seven new HIV infections among adolescents aged 15–19 years in the region are among girls. AIDS-related illnesses remain the leading cause of death among young women in sub-Saharan Africa.

Almost 70 countries worldwide criminalize same-sex sexual relationships. Gay men and other men who have sex with men, sex workers, transgender people, people in prison and people who inject drugs are left with little or no access to health or social services, allowing HIV to spread among the most vulnerable in society.



This is why the Global AIDS Strategy has ending the inequalities that drive new HIV infections and keep people from accessing the health services they need at its heart. The strategy also sets new 10–10–10 targets on the removal of punitive laws that criminalize key populations and expansion of supportive laws and policies to fight stigma, discrimination, gender-based violence, and gender inequality.

We must roll back these punitive laws and laws that target people living with HIV. And we must fight the informal rules that tolerate violence against women and girls and tolerate homophobia.

So my plea to you today is that as parliamentarians you be the voice of all your citizens, you speak up for the voiceless, the people left behind, the people suffering from stigma and discrimination, and be courageous fighters for equality. Fight inequality in your budget and legislative roles.

By fighting inequalities we will not only end AIDS; we will strengthen our collective ability to overcome COVID-19 and future crises. We will build pandemic preparedness and resilience and ensure the right to health for all.

Thank you.

