

PRESS STATEMENT

UNAIDS rejects prejudice and misconceptions about men who have sex with men and transgender people

Efforts to increase access to HIV prevention and treatment services must be scaled up alongside societal efforts to eliminate homophobia

NEW DELHI, 5 July 2011—UNAIDS lauds efforts by India's National AIDS programme to provide HIV services for men who have sex with men and transgender people. Currently around 67% of men who have sex with men in India are accessing prevention services. According to estimates of the National AIDS Control Organization, there are more than 400 000 men who have sex with men in India; HIV prevalence in this population is about 7.3% compared to a national adult HIV prevalence of 0.31%.

"India's rich tradition of inclusivity and social justice must include men who have sex with men and transgender people," said Michel Sidibé, UNAIDS Executive Director, on the side lines of the National Convention of Parliamentarians and elected representatives. "India's successful AIDS response has been possible due to the strong participation of communities of men who have sex men, sex workers, people who inject drugs and transgender people backed by a strong and progressive National AIDS policy."

UNAIDS welcomes the call by the Prime Minister of India, Dr Manmohan Singh, to have an "HIV sensitive" policy and programmes so that the marginalized populations affected by HIV are not denied the benefits of health and development programmes. "We should work to assure for them a life of dignity and wellbeing. We have to ensure that there is no stigma and discrimination towards HIV infected and affected persons," said Dr Singh. During the inauguration of the National Convention, Dr Singh reiterated his government's strategy to provide HIV services to groups at higher risk of HIV infection.

"There is no place for stigma and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation," said Mr Sidibé. "I welcome the bipartisan call by Mrs Sonia Gandhi and Mrs Sushma Swaraj to end all forms of stigma and discrimination against people at increased risk of HIV infection."

In 2009 the Delhi High Court overturned a law that criminalized consensual adult sexual behaviour. This stand was also supported by the Government of India in its affidavit filed with the Supreme Court.

"Consistent with WHO's disease classification, UNAIDS does not regard homosexuality as a disease," said Mr Sidibé. According to the recently released UNAIDS and WHO guidelines on prevention and treatment of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections among men who have sex with men and transgender people, legislators and other government authorities should establish anti-discrimination and protective laws in order to eliminate discrimination and violence faced by men who have sex with men and transgender people.

UNAIDS is committed to providing support to India's successful AIDS response, which has seen new HIV infections drop by more than 50% in the last decade. India currently produces more than 85% of high-quality generic antiretroviral drugs for the majority of low- and middle income countries. India's courts have progressively protected the human rights of people living with HIV and men who have sex with men by striking down discriminatory laws.

UNAIDS' vision: Zero new HIV infections. Zero discrimination. Zero AIDS-related deaths.

UNAIDS will work with the Government of India, civil society and community groups in realizing the vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths in India.

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UNAIDS, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, is an innovative United Nations partnership that leads and inspires the world in achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. Learn more at unaids.org.