

## PRESS STATEMENT

### **UNAIDS calls for greater leadership in addressing human rights violations in the AIDS response**

**GENEVA, 9 December 2011**—On the occasion of Human Rights Day, 10 December, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) is calling on countries to protect, promote and uphold human rights for all people living with and vulnerable to HIV.

Violence against women and girls; stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV or people vulnerable to HIV infection; punitive approaches to key populations at higher risk of infection; criminalization based on sexual orientation and gender identity; and HIV-related restrictions on entry, stay and residence not only violate human rights but also act as barriers to accessing HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services.

“Respect for human rights is a non-negotiable requirement for the AIDS response,” said Michel Sidibé, UNAIDS Executive Director. “Only through dignity and equality can we promote a socially sustainable agenda.”

An estimated 76 countries and areas have laws that criminalize same-sex sexual relations between consenting adults—five impose the death penalty. More than 100 countries criminalize some aspect of sex work, and most States have policies or laws that result in people dependent on drugs being subject to criminal penalties. In addition, 47 countries continue to impose some form of restriction on the entry, stay and residence of people living with HIV.

In March 2011, the UN Human Rights Council urged all States to eliminate ‘criminal and other laws that are counterproductive to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support efforts, including laws directly mandating disclosure of HIV status or that violate the human rights of people living with HIV and members of key populations’. It also urged States to enact laws to protect people affected by HIV from discrimination, abuses and violence while accessing HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services.

In the *2011 United Nations Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS*, countries reaffirmed their commitment to promote universal respect for, and the observance of, all human rights in their responses to HIV. The declaration noted that HIV prevention strategies inadequately focus on populations at higher risk—specifically men who have sex with men, people who inject drugs and sex workers, and called on countries to focus their response based on epidemiological and national contexts.

#### **Contact**

UNAIDS Geneva | Sophie Barton-Knott | tel. +41 22 791 1697 | bartonknotts@unaids.org

#### **UNAIDS**

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](http://unaids.org).