

## HUMAN RIGHTS DAY MESSAGE

### **Ending the AIDS epidemic is a matter of human rights**

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**Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS**

**Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations**

I believe we can end the AIDS epidemic by 2030. This is a goal we should all aspire to—but it can only happen if the human rights of all people vulnerable to and living with HIV are realized.

HIV has taught us that health and human rights are intricately linked and that we need to protect and respect human rights and be courageous enough to confront society's wrongs. It is unacceptable that women and girls, sex workers, people who use drugs, migrants, prisoners, men who have sex with men and transgender people are assaulted, violated and murdered, and yet our conscience is not revolted, nor our sense of human responsibility challenged. How can the world accept that some people have access to safety and services while others are excluded because of legal and social status, income or sexual orientation? Even where HIV services exist, punitive laws and law enforcement can stand as implacable barriers. We must reject this double standard wherever we encounter it.

Human rights must be respected and fulfilled for everybody. People who are suffering, who are underground or who are hiding do not deserve silence—they deserve justice.

People living with and vulnerable to HIV have fought for and, in many places, won their human rights—the rights to nondiscrimination, to participation, to health in the form of HIV prevention and treatment, and to life. They have turned traditional development on its head by demanding “nothing about us without us”, refusing to be passive beneficiaries, demanding to be themselves agents of change. But millions more do not benefit from health or human rights.

Achieving our vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths will demand human rights. Everyone has equal dignity and value, and everyone deserves the right to health and to life.

President Nelson Mandela said it well, “Courage is not the absence of fear—it’s inspiring others to move beyond it.” This is having the courage to end the AIDS epidemic; it is also having the courage to radically reshape our world—into a world where no-one is left behind. This is the legacy of President Mandela. Let us build on his legacy and make it the future—through human rights for all.

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## **UNAIDS**

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) leads and inspires the world to achieve its shared vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. UNAIDS unites the efforts of 11 UN organizations—UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, UN Women, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank—and works closely with global and national partners to maximize results for the AIDS response. Learn more at [unaids.org](http://unaids.org) and connect with us on Facebook and Twitter.