

# MEMO

To : Henriëtte van Gullik, Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
From : STOP AIDS NOW! (José Pauw, Janherman Veenker)  
Cc : Els Klinkert  
Date : 06 December 2004  
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Subject : Comments on memorandum 'Women, Gender and AIDS'

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In general we feel that the document presented and the Development Plan of The Global Coalition on Women and AIDS makes a strong statement regarding women, their vulnerability for HIV and AIDS, and the biological, cultural, social and economic context in which this vulnerability has to be understood. The Development Plan of the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS (*the Global Coalition*) reflects this sound understanding and proposes a comprehensive, well thought through approach, based on well chosen key principles.

We would like to make the following more critical remarks with regard to the Development Plan.

1. It is stated (Chapter !.2) that the Global Coalition focuses deliberately on women rather than gender. We agree that in doing so, the immediate needs of women can best be addressed. We also agree that to structurally change gender inequalities is indeed a long-term endeavor. However, this should not prevent the Global Coalition to stimulate where possible the involvement of men and boys and actively seek to enlist them as allies. It becomes increasingly clear that for women to have access to services – like care and treatment, or information - the *immediate* cooperation of men is necessary. This need, we feel, is not fully addressed in the present development plan. In addition, it is not clear what will be done neither which partnerships will be included to change male attitudes and behaviors towards e.g. condom use, or inheritance rights *in the short term*. The partnerships needed should include organizations that are able to reach and involve men as well.
2. The Development Plan acknowledges (Chapter II, 6, last bullet point) the importance of access to education for girls and women. Throughout the text, several examples are given how to make it easier for girls to attend schools, as by reducing or abolishing schools fees and offering meals. However, that girls drop out isn't just caused by schools costs, but also by cultural and social concepts of gender roles, which see education as less important for girls than for boys. In addition girls tend to have much more responsibilities for family tasks. Advocacy may take this into account and encourage schools to organize the curriculum in such a way that other obligations don't have to interfere with school schedules. On the other hand responsibilities of national and local government to enforce school attendance, both by legislation and by actual measures to uphold the law should be underlined as well.
3. Religious fundamentalist groups play mostly a negative role in HIV and AIDS prevention, especially concerning the role and the empowerment of girls and women. The impact of these religious movements should be taken in account in the analysis and strategy of the Global Coalition. Viable approaches should be discussed and tried out, including dialogue and community outreach.
4. The Global Coalition has organized its work for the coming years around three aims, for each of its seven action areas: build a broad partnership network, improve the evidence base and develop targeted advocacy messages. We support these concrete aims, and think they help

considerably to achieve concrete results.

With regard to the improving the evidence base, we strongly underline the need to strengthen and increase partnerships between research institutes working internationally and institutes working nationally or locally. In addition we have the impression that the involvement of research institutes<sup>1</sup> in the action areas of *preventing HIV infection in adolescent girls, violence against women, equal access to care and treatment, and community based care* is too weak to substantially improve the evidence base in a relatively short period. We urge the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs to make a speedy assessment whether enough funding is made available for research in the action areas mentioned.

With regard to building partnerships we ask special attention for the action area of *property and inheritance rights*, where we feel that partnerships with organizations that support women to enhance and enforce their rights – legally and/or or through community outreach and mediation - should be especially encouraged. Here too we urge the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs to assess whether the convening agencies ICRW/FAO are adequately funded to complement their work with partnerships and a strategy that aim for actual support to women to secure inheritance and independent income sources.

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<sup>1</sup> As opposed to community based or campaigning and advocacy organizations. Of course, research institutes involved should have a track record in involving communities.