

## PRESS STATEMENT

### **UNAIDS calls on countries to put the health and rights of women and girls at the centre of efforts to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030**

**GENEVA, 25 November 2015**—On the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, UNAIDS is urging countries to put women and girls at the centre of efforts to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030.

AIDS is the leading cause of death of women of reproductive age (15–49 years) and adolescent girls and young women are most affected by HIV. Every year around 380 000 adolescent girls and young women become newly infected with HIV and in sub-Saharan Africa adolescent girls and young women aged 15–24 years account for one in every four new HIV infections.

“AIDS-related deaths are increasing among adolescents and we are seeing increased violence against young women,” said UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibé. “Our call is to address the root cause—gender inequality, which can result in violence, lack of esteem, growing vulnerability and difficulty for young women and girls to make empowered and informed decisions about their health and well-being.”

In some regions, women who have experienced physical or sexual partner violence are 1.5 times more likely to acquire HIV compared to women who have not. While the experiences of violence faced by women living with HIV mirror those of women generally, living with HIV exposes women and girls to other forms of violence, including forced and coerced sterilization, because of their HIV-positive status.

The heightened vulnerability of women and girls to HIV is intricately linked to the sociocultural, economic and political inequalities they experience. Ending the AIDS epidemic will depend on a social justice agenda that demands equity in education, employment, political representation and access to justice and health, free from violence.

At the start of the annual 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, which is being held under the 2015 theme of “From peace in the home to peace in the world: make education safe for all,” UNAIDS is urging all countries to ensure the engagement and empowerment of women as a top priority to enable women and girls to live in a world free of inequalities and violence.

The newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the UNAIDS 2016–2021 Strategy, reflect a collective global commitment to achieve gender equality, eliminate gender-based violence and advance the rights of women and girls, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, and their empowerment. Significantly, they provide a bold blueprint for action. These goals and targets call for true collaboration across sectors and generations to scale up efforts to ensure the safety and empowerment of women and girls everywhere.

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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 towards ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals. Learn more at [unaids.org](http://unaids.org) and connect with us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.