

PRESS STATEMENT

Respecting women's human rights is key to creating a safer, fairer and healthier world

Message from UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibé on International Women's Day

GENEVA, 8 March 2016—On International Women's Day, the world must reaffirm its commitment to achieving full respect for women's human rights both as a moral obligation and as a keystone for a safer, fairer and healthier world. Empowering this generation of women and girls and closing the gender gap is a central component of the Sustainable Development Goals and is crucial to ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030.

Despite some progress in moving towards gender parity in certain areas, such as education and political representation, many challenges remain. The pace of change in reducing inequality is unacceptably slow. For example, women continue to earn far less than men and face problems in accessing essential health-care services, including sexual and reproductive health care.

Every day, more than 40 000 girls are married before their 18th birthday,¹ complications linked to pregnancy and childbirth remain the second leading cause of death among adolescent girls aged 15 to 19² and it is estimated that around 120 million girls worldwide have experienced rape or other forced sexual acts at some point in their lives.³

The vulnerabilities and risks associated with HIV are closely linked to the gender inequalities woven into the political, economic and social fabric of our societies. AIDS-related illnesses are the leading cause of death globally among women of reproductive age. In 2014, there were around 220 000 new HIV infections worldwide among adolescents aged 10 to 19, with adolescent girls accounting for 62% of new infections among this age group. In sub-Saharan Africa, adolescent girls aged 10 to 19 make up 72% of total new HIV infections among this age group. Gender-based violence and a lack of control over decisions affecting their own lives increase the risk of HIV infection among women and girls.

One week before the sixtieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women and three months ahead of the United Nations General Assembly High-Level Meeting on Ending AIDS, the world must recognize the undeniable link between achieving social justice and creating the foundations for an end to the AIDS epidemic. No one must be left behind.

The UNAIDS Fast-Track approach to ending the AIDS epidemic has a set of time-bound targets, including reducing the number of people newly infected with HIV from 2 million in 2014 to fewer than 500 000 in 2020, reducing the number of people dying from AIDS-related illnesses from 1.2 million in 2014 to fewer than 500 000 in 2020 and eliminating HIV-related

¹ <https://plan-international.org/child-marriage?gclid=COSA7uzWpssCFUwq0wodMslBvQ>.

² <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs345/en/>.

³ Hidden in plain sight, http://www.unicef.org/publications/index_74865.html.

discrimination. These targets will not be reached without much stronger progress on ensuring that women's human rights are respected so they are free to take informed decisions about their health and well-being.

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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 and connect with us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.