

Message on the occasion of Human Rights Day

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The advances in the response to HIV have been unprecedented. In South Africa in 2000, just 90 people had access to antiretroviral therapy. Today, South Africa has the largest treatment programme in the world, with 4.2 million people living with HIV in the country now on treatment. We have exceeded global targets and today around the world 20.9 million people have access to life-saving HIV medicines.

However, we cannot be complacent—AIDS is not over in any part of the world and the challenges ahead remain significant. Studies from 19 countries show that approximately one in five people living with HIV had been denied health care (including dental care, family planning services or sexual and reproductive health services). Data from eight countries show that 25% of people living with HIV avoided going to hospital because they feared stigma or discrimination related to their HIV status, and one in three women living with HIV had experienced at least one form of discrimination in health-care settings related to their sexual and reproductive health.

These challenges are underpinned by inequalities and discrimination, which are preventing the most vulnerable to the epidemic, including women, young people and key populations, from exercising their right to health. We have a moral and legal responsibility to act against discrimination and protect human rights. Only when human dignity and equality are preserved can we fully realize [My Health, My Right](#).

On Human Rights Day, I urge everyone to reflect on how the AIDS epidemic has transformed our understanding of the structural, legal and social determinants of health and on the power of people living with and affected by HIV, who came together to break the conspiracy of silence to demand the protection of human rights. The lessons from the past should reenergize us to face the challenges ahead.

The Sustainable Development Goals offer a transformative global agenda grounded in the commitment to leave no one behind and end the AIDS epidemic as a public health threat by 2030. To realize this global goal, I call on everyone to [stand up for human rights](#) and to recommit to the respect, protection and fulfilment of rights for all.

The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 10 December as Human Rights Day in 1950, to draw attention to the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) as the common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations.

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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, Instagram and YouTube.