

PRESS STATEMENT

UNAIDS welcomes the call by Pope Francis not to discriminate

PANAMA CITY/GENEVA, 28 January 2019—During a visit to the Good Samaritan Foundation and Home for people living with HIV in Panama, Pope Francis has urged people not to discriminate against their neighbours. The Good Samaritan Foundation and Home, or Casa Hogar El Buen Samaritano, is currently home to 16 people living with HIV aged from 16 to 60 years. They were among the first to be greeted by His Holiness during his visit.

“The Good Samaritan, whether in the parable or in all of your homes, shows us that our neighbour is first of all a person, someone with a real, particular face, not something to avoid or ignore, whatever his or her situation may be,” said Pope Francis.

Pope Francis travelled to Panama from 23 to 27 January to celebrate World Youth Day with young people from across the world. The visit to Casa Hogar El Buen Samaritano took place on the final day of his visit. His Holiness said that the work of the home confirms people’s faith by “anointing wounds, renewing hope and encouraging faith.”

For 15 years, Casa Hogar El Buen Samaritano has provided comprehensive care and treatment to help people living with HIV recover their health and dignity and reconnect with their communities and families. It also provides HIV prevention education for thousands of people, including young people in schools and young people who may be at risk of HIV.

The First Lady of Panama and UNAIDS Special Ambassador for AIDS in Latin America, Lorena Castillo de Varela, joined the visit, as did the Executive Director of UNAIDS, Michel Sidibé.

“Casa Hogar El Buen Samaritano embraces all people, regardless of their health or HIV status,” said Mr Sidibé. “Faith organizations like Buen Samaritano have an amazing ability to touch the lives of the people who are most difficult to reach and to remove the barriers of stigma and discrimination. Faith communities speaking out about HIV can move us closer to ending the AIDS epidemic,” he added.

UNAIDS works closely with the Catholic Church and the Holy See on shared goals, such as eliminating new HIV infections among children and increasing access to paediatric testing and treatment. Zero discrimination is key to achieving those goals.

Globally, significant gaps remain in preventing, diagnosing and treating HIV among children. In 2017, there were 180 000 new HIV infections among children globally. Just half (52%) of infants exposed to HIV worldwide received early infant diagnostic tests within the first two months of life and only 52% of children living with HIV had access to treatment in 2017.

The Vatican has convened a high-level discussion, Scaling Up Early Diagnosis and Treatment of Children and Adolescents, bringing together leaders of major pharmaceutical companies,

multilateral organizations, donors and governments. While there is still ground to cover, there have been positive results in accelerating paediatric diagnosis and treatment. UNAIDS is continuing to work with all partners, including the Vatican, to scale up HIV services for children.

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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.