

PRESS STATEMENT

UNAIDS condemns new law that further criminalizes and marginalizes vulnerable groups of people in Uganda

GENEVA, 6 May 2021—UNAIDS is deeply concerned by the Ugandan parliament’s decision earlier this week to adopt the Sexual Offences Bill 2019, which includes provisions that further criminalize entire groups of people, such as the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, sex workers and people living with HIV. The bill criminalizes same-sex sexual relations, extends the criminalization of sex work and imposes mandatory testing for HIV and harsher sentences on people living with HIV than the general population accused of some similar crimes.

Although UNAIDS welcomes some aspects of the bill, such as the extension of protection from sexual harassment, violence and sexual exploitation to groups of people such as people in detention and migrant workers, it urges parliamentarians to reconsider the provisions that discriminate against some people.

“I am deeply troubled by the Ugandan parliament’s adoption of portions of this bill that further criminalize and marginalize vulnerable groups of fellow citizens and deny them their human rights, including their right to health,” said UNAIDS Executive Director, Winnie Byanyima. “Targeting people living with HIV, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities and sex workers increases stigma and discrimination and undermines the HIV response by preventing people from receiving the HIV treatment, prevention and care services that they so urgently need.”

UNAIDS recognizes the good progress that Uganda has made in recent years in reducing the impact of HIV. The number of AIDS-related deaths has fallen by 60% since 2010, with 1.2 million people out of 1.5 million people living with HIV on medicines to keep them alive and well. In addition, the number of new HIV infections has fallen by 43% since 2010. However, many vulnerable groups of people, such as gay men and other men who have sex with men and sex workers, continue to be less likely than the general population to receive the HIV treatment, prevention and care services they need.

UNAIDS urges Uganda to join the growing number of countries in Africa and globally that are removing unjust laws from their penal codes. The Ugandan parliament’s adoption of the new law comes just weeks before the United Nations General Assembly High-Level Meeting on AIDS, which will take place from 8 to 10 June 2021.

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Contact

UNAIDS Geneva | Michael Hollingdale | tel. +41 79 500 2119 | hollingdalem@unaids.org

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 and connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.