

UNAIDS PCB Bureau meeting

DATE: Tuesday, 10 March 2022

TIME: 13:00-14:00 CET

VENUE: Virtual

PARTICIPANTS

PCB Bureau: H.E. Mr Rongvudhi Virabutr, Dr Preecha Prempre, Dr Walaiporn Patcharanarumol, Dr Thaksaphon Thammarangsi, Dr Sairat Noknoy, Ms Parichart Chantcharas, Mr Natee Vichitsorasatra, and Dr Cha-aim Pachanee representing the PCB Chair (Thailand); Mr Paul Zubeil representing the PCB Vice-Chair (Germany); Dr Peace Mutuma representing the PCB Rapporteur (Kenya); Dr Chewe Luo and Ms Bettina T. Schunter representing the Chair of the Committee of Cosponsoring Organizations; and Mr Jumoke Patrick representing the PCB NGO Delegation.

UNAIDS Secretariat: Mr Morten Ussing, Director, Governance and Multilateral Affairs, Ms Samia Lounnas, Senior Governance Advisor, Governance and Multilateral Affairs, and Ms Maggie Lemons, Governance Officer, Governance and Multilateral Affairs

Invited Speakers: Mr Aleksey Lakhov and Ms Dinah Bons, representatives of the PCB NGO Delegation; Mr Eamonn Murphy, Deputy Executive Director, a.i., Programme; Professor Matt Kavanagh, Deputy Executive Director a.i., Policy and Advocacy; and Mr Roman Hailevich, UNAIDS Country Director, Ukraine.

MEETING AGENDA

1. **Letter from the NGO Delegation on the situation for people living with HIV in Ukraine** (13:00-13:50): *The PCB Bureau will discuss the letter received from the NGO Delegation on the situation for people living with HIV in Ukraine.*
2. **Any other business** (13:50-14:00)

SUMMARY

H.E. Mr Rongvudhi Virabutr, Ambassador, Deputy Permanent Representative and Chargé d'affaires a.i., Permanent Mission of Thailand in Geneva, representing Thailand as the PCB Bureau Chair, welcomed the Bureau members to their third meeting and thanked participants for joining on short notice.

1. Letter from the PCB NGO Delegation on the situation of people living with HIV in Ukraine

The Chair recalled the purpose of the meeting to discuss further action on the letter received from the PCB NGO Delegation addressed to the Chair of the PCB, which expressed concern over the humanitarian conflict in Ukraine and its impact on the HIV response and the situation for people living with HIV in Ukraine (annex 1).

The Chair invited the Secretariat to provide advice received from legal counsel on options for next steps. The Secretariat reported that the Legal Counsel had outlined the following options for the consideration of the PCB Bureau:

- The Chair could circulate the NGO Delegation's letter to all PCB members for information and could indicate that there will be an opportunity to discuss this at the 50th PCB meeting under the report of the Executive Director.
- In collaboration with the Executive Director, the Bureau could consider adding a discussion item to the 50th PCB meeting agenda on the response of the Joint Programme to the crisis in Ukraine.
- The Chair could send the letter to the Executive Director suggesting that the EXD organize an informal discussion with members of the PCB on the actions being undertaken by the Joint Programme in relation to the crisis in Ukraine.
- The Chair could communicate to the NGO Delegation that they had passed on the letter to the Executive Director for her information and to take forward in the response of the Joint Programme to the crisis in Ukraine.

PCB Bureau members thanked the NGO Delegation for raising these important issues and agreed that, in light of the urgency of the situation, waiting until June for the 50th meeting of the PCB would be too late. They agreed that priority should be given to the final proposed option above – to convey the concerns of the Delegation to the Executive Director for her information and action to take forward in the response of the Joint Programme to the crisis in Ukraine. Bureau members proposed that the Executive Director continue to update the PCB on ongoing progress to support people living with HIV in Ukraine. The Bureau further agreed that the letter would be annexed to the summary of the Bureau meeting.

Noting concerns regarding access to ARVs and OST in Ukraine and other countries receiving refugees from Ukraine, Bureau members stressed the importance of ensuring access to lifesaving medication. Members urged the Joint Programme to coordinate their efforts both internally and externally and to ensure concrete actions are taken urgently to support people living with, at risk of and affected by HIV in this and other humanitarian crises. A member of the bureau encouraged leveraging existing efforts from the Joint Programme, including WHO, to support the provision of supplies to affected people; for instance, supporting ongoing efforts from the WHO in terms of supplies and logistics along operational hubs and land corridors set up to facilitate rapid movement of supplies to affected populations.

Eamonn Murphy, UNAIDS Deputy Executive Director, a.i., Programme, and Roman Hailevich, UNAIDS Country Director, Ukraine, provided an update, on behalf of the Secretariat, on actions taken by the Joint Programme to support people living with HIV in Ukraine, including those related to medication shortages and other humanitarian issues. The Joint Programme was closely monitoring the situation and identifying priority actions. The Secretariat noted challenges with logistics to delivering humanitarian aid. The Joint Programme was working closely with key partners, including the Global Fund and PEPFAR, to address medication shortages and to catalyse funding, as well as with non-profit organizations working in the country. The Secretariat underscored that the Joint Programme is working in humanitarian emergency settings around the

world, and would continue to leverage their collective expertise to support people living with HIV in such settings.

Following the meeting's discussion, the Bureau agreed to take the following action:

- The Chair would send a letter forwarding the NGO letter to the Executive Director for her information and for her to consider taking forward the necessary actions in the response of the Joint Programme to the crisis in Ukraine.
- the NGO letter will be shared as part of the minutes of this PCB Bureau meeting with all PCB members

2. AOB

There was no other business raised. The Chair thanked members for their valuable time and for joining the meeting on short notice.

[Annex follows]

Annex 1: Letter from the PCB NGO Delegation on the situation for people living with HIV in Ukraine



3 March 2022

Ambassador H.E. Mr Rongvudhi Virabutr
Permanent Representative and Chargé d'affaires,
Permanent Mission of Thailand to the United Nations Office and other international
organizations in Geneva
Chair, UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board Bureau

Excellency,

With deep sadness, concern, and alarm, we, the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board (PCB) NGO Delegation, have been watching the humanitarian crisis unfold in Ukraine after the start of the military offensive by the Russian government. We have witnessed from history the damages caused by wars and colonial invasions that threaten basic human rights and the health and well-being of people in conflict zones. Our thoughts and prayers are with everyone impacted by this war, especially those who have lost their loved ones as a result of this senseless bloodshed.

Ukraine has the second largest AIDS epidemic in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region¹. It is estimated that there are 250,000 people living with HIV in Ukraine and 156,000 of them are on antiretroviral therapy (ARVs). The ongoing war in Ukraine has already jeopardised the significant advances in HIV prevention, treatment, and care that the government, civil society, and the international community have made in recent years. As a result of the recent military offensive, people living with HIV may be left without life-saving ARVs, lose access to screening tests and other medical services, and face difficulties in treating comorbidities such as viral hepatitis B and C and TB.

Key populations, including people who use drugs, sex workers, gay men and other men who have sex with men, and transgender people will also be heavily impacted by this war. Reports from our community colleagues on the ground are already indicating that there are disruptions in opioid substitution therapy (OST), especially in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. Also, news reports surfaced that racialized migrants of African and Asian backgrounds experienced racism and discrimination from border guards from boarding trains or fleeing the country. Apart from the immediate implications on the health of the members of key populations, their safety and well-being are also of utmost importance, as there is a growing threat of hostility and violence against them. We are also concerned that if there is no cessation of the military offensive, this could lead to an upsurge of refugees and people being displaced, which will further exacerbate their current life situation.

¹ UNAIDS press statement, February 25th, 2022

https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/pressreleaseandstatementarchive/2022/february/2022/0225_ukraine

Chair, please recognize that as people living with and affected by HIV, we cannot be passive observers to the present humanitarian crisis in Ukraine. Therefore, as we join efforts with representatives of civil society from all over the world, we call on this body to do everything possible to prevent this humanitarian catastrophe from getting worse.

Our Delegation calls on members of the PCB to undertake urgent actions to mitigate the impact of this crisis, especially for people living with HIV and key populations in Ukraine. Specifically, we request the Joint Programme to:

- 1) Create and enact an emergency HIV humanitarian response plan for Ukraine
- 2) Support immediate consultations with networks and organizations of people living with HIV, key populations and other civil society and community organizations in Ukraine for purposes of data gathering, needs assessment, and development of actions to address and respond to their most urgent needs.
- 3) Provide direct guidance and action in Ukraine and neighbouring receiving countries to ensure that people living with HIV and key populations, including people displaced or on the move:
 - i. have access to life-saving medications, including ARVs, treatment for Hepatitis C and TB, and OST;
 - ii. ii) have access to basic goods and services, including housing and security; and iii) have their basic human rights, including the right to life, health and dignity, respected and protected.
- 4) Provide updates on the progress of the above-proposed actions.
- 5) Support the international calls for lasting peace in the region and cessation of hostilities.

As NGO members of the PCB, we express our intention to participate and actively engage in crafting these strategies and actions. We look forward to working with you to mitigate the impact of this war on our community and civil society constituencies in Ukraine and in hoping for a lasting solution to this humanitarian emergency.

In solidarity,

Aleksey Lakhov and Dinah Bons, NGO Europe
On behalf of the full PCB NGO Delegation

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