



Press statement

UNAIDS and OHCHR express concern at reports of violence against people living with HIV in Papua New Guinea and supports the Government's call to investigate

Port Moresby, 30 August 2007 – Alarmed by recent reports that people living with HIV have been buried alive in the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) express their serious concerns that gross violations of human rights may have been committed against HIV positive people.

Worldwide, UNAIDS and OHCHR condemn acts of violence, stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV and are fully committed to supporting governments to protect their people from such human rights violations. UNAIDS and OHCHR work with governments and communities to develop and implement programmes aimed at reducing stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV, as well as securing other human rights relevant in the context of the HIV epidemic.

In this context, UNAIDS and OHCHR welcome the announcement from Hon. Michael Ogio, Care Taker Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on HIV and AIDS, that the Government of Papua New Guinea will investigate the reported crimes. UNAIDS and OHCHR urge the Government to proceed with the investigation as a priority and to take appropriate legal action against any perpetrators of these alleged crimes.

UNAIDS and OHCHR reiterate their full support to the Government of Papua New Guinea in its efforts to implement legal and social protections for people living with HIV and to strengthen programmes to eliminate stigma, discrimination and violence against people living with HIV, women and others in the country who are particularly vulnerable to HIV.

UNAIDS and OHCHR also welcome the government's efforts to scale up access to HIV services in rural areas, such as Tari in the Southern Highlands province. Widespread ignorance about HIV in isolated rural communities increases the risk of HIV infection and can fuel acts of violence, stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV.

Implementation of a comprehensive AIDS response throughout the country is required to increase knowledge of HIV, to remove prejudices against people living with HIV, and to secure rights to security, treatment, care and support.

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UNAIDS is an innovative joint venture of the United Nations, bringing together the efforts and resources of the UNAIDS Secretariat and ten UN system organizations in the AIDS response. The Secretariat headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland—with staff on the ground in more than 80 countries. Coherent action on AIDS by the UN system is coordinated in countries through UN theme groups, and joint programmes on AIDS. UNAIDS' Cosponsors include UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank. Visit the UNAIDS Web site at www.unaids.org