



**UNAIDS**  
JOINT UNITED NATIONS PROGRAMME ON HIV/AIDS

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To all Speakers of Parliaments

28 November 2011

Dear Madam President,  
Dear Mr President,

World AIDS Day will be celebrated on 1 December.

For over 30 years, AIDS has proved to be much more than an epidemic. It has caused over 30 million deaths and infected an estimated 34 million people who are living with HIV today. The response to AIDS, however, has proven to be a force for positive social change, challenging global health inequity, discrimination, exclusion and gender inequality.

Today, progress against AIDS is picking up pace, thanks to the bold actions of political leaders, scientists and those affected by the epidemic. Infection rates are in retreat across the world. Antiretroviral treatment not only saves lives, but also reduces infectiousness by 96%, so that HIV treatment has also become HIV prevention.

However, in today's world, the law has not always supported these developments. Many countries still have laws, regulations or policies that present obstacles to effective HIV prevention and treatment, care and support for the people living with or most vulnerable to HIV.

According to data compiled by UNAIDS, some 56 countries have laws which criminalize HIV non-disclosure, exposure and transmission, although there is no evidence to suggest that the criminal law supports HIV prevention. Forty-seven countries still impose some form of restriction on the entry, stay and residence of people living with HIV based on their status, even though people living with HIV present no threat and are in fact living long and productive lives. Seventy-nine countries and territories criminalize same-sex sexual relations between consenting adults and six countries apply the death penalty, despite numerous international commitments to end discrimination based on sexual orientation. Finally, punitive legal approaches to sex work and drug dependency drive these individuals underground and away from HIV and other health services, increasing their vulnerability to HIV, as well as the vulnerability of the wider population.

Beyond these legal challenges, global resource allocations to national HIV responses, either through domestic spending or international assistance, have flat-lined at a defining moment when we have the evidence and tools to halt and turn back the epidemic.

On this World AIDS Day, we ask for your continued engagement and leadership - individually and collectively. We urge you to keep AIDS high on the agenda of your Parliament and your country, not only in memory of those who have died of AIDS but also for a future "AIDS-free" generation. Together, through passion and commitment, we can achieve our vision of "zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths".

Yours sincerely,

Anders B. Johnsson  
Secretary General  
Inter-Parliamentary Union

Michel Sidibé  
Executive Director  
Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS