



Kampala, Sunday 1st December 2024

Commemoration of World AIDS Day 2024

“Take the Rights path”

On this World AIDS Day, Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF) stands in solidarity with the millions of people around the world, particularly in Uganda, who are living with HIV. This year’s theme, *“Take the Rights Path”*, emphasizes the critical importance of upholding human rights as central to ending the AIDS epidemic.

We recognise the invaluable role of communities, especially those of key populations, in the fight against HIV/AIDS. These communities, including people who use drugs, sex workers, men who have sex with men, transgender people, and others disproportionately affected by HIV, continue to face significant challenges. However, they encounter significant barriers including – stigma, discrimination, criminalisation, and violence which has kept them out of reach of services and interventions aimed at curbing HIV spread.

According to UNAIDS, HIV prevalence remains alarmingly high among key populations (KPs) due to inequitable access to quality services, compounded by social exclusion and state-sanctioned violence. In Uganda, the continued criminalisation of sex work, drug use, and consensual same-sex relations complicates access to critical HIV services. The Anti-Homosexuality Act, 2023 in particular its prohibition of ‘promotion of homosexuality’ which is couched in very wide and vague terms can easily be interpreted to prohibit the provision of health and legal services, which further exacerbates the situation for criminalized marginalised groups. The Sexual Offences Bill 2024 threatens to further marginalise and make it more difficult for KPs to seek out and access HIV prevention and care services.

The legal framework has further stifled the efforts of key population-led community engagements, leading to the breakdown of once-effective strategies that empowered communities to address HIV prevention. This is a stark contrast to the rights-based approach Uganda had previously adopted, which was instrumental in achieving progress towards the global 95-95-95 targets aimed at ending AIDS.

In line with this year’s theme, *“Take the Rights Path,”* HRAPF calls upon the Government of Uganda to adopt a rights-based approach to HIV prevention and treatment. This can be achieved

through repealing discriminatory laws like the AHA 2023, promoting equitable access to HIV services for all, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or occupation and addressing structural violence through investigating human rights violations against KPs and bringing perpetrators of violence to account.

Ending AIDS is not just a public health challenge - it is a human rights challenge. Only by protecting and promoting the rights of all individuals can we ensure that no one is left behind in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Let us commit to taking the rights path to achieve an AIDS-free future for Uganda and the world.

Taking human rights to all

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