

Kampala, Friday 10th December 2021

## **HUMAN RIGHTS AMIDST PANDEMICS: THE NEED FOR EQUALITY AND INCLUSION OF THE MOST MARGINALISED IN COVID-19 RECOVERY AND THE FIGHT AGAINST HIV/AIDS**

**“ALL HUMAN, ALL EQUAL”**

### *Commemoration of International Human Rights day*

Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF) joins the rest of the world to commemorate the International Human Rights Day. This year marks the 73<sup>rd</sup> year since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted on 10th December 1948, and this is cause for celebration as this document continues to guide and inspire the protection of human rights globally.

This day comes amidst the continued COVID-19 pandemic that has brought about a ‘new normal,’ at a great cost of human lives whilst exposing and exacerbating inequalities and marginalisation. Vulnerable and marginalised groups such as sexual minorities, sex workers, drug users and petty offenders have faced some of the harshest effects of the pandemic and its attendant regulations. They have often had to endure violence meted out by both state and non-state actors based on their sexual orientation or gender identity, their addiction, the nature of their work, and their economic status, all under the guise of enforcing COVID-19 regulations.

People living with HIV/AIDS, particularly Key Populations have also endured an upsurge of discrimination, stigma and limited access drugs and to services. HRAPF through its legal aid clinic has witnessed an upsurge in cases of violations of rights of marginalised persons and poor people in Uganda.

The most prevalent forms of violations are of the right to liberty and freedom from inhuman and degrading treatment. Most of the victims of violations are arrested and charged with ‘doing a negligent act likely to spread infection of disease’. They are often subjected to beatings and other forms of abuse. The COVID - 19 directives also seem to target the poor, and most marginalised.

The theme this year is ‘Equality: Reducing inequalities, advancing human rights.’ This reflects the theme for this year’s World AIDS Day, which was ‘End Inequalities, End AIDS, End Pandemics.’ Both themes highlight the urgent need to end the inequalities that drive COVID-19, HIV/AIDS, and other pandemics

around the world.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed several inequalities right from the COVID-19 relief distribution that has alienated vulnerable and marginalised persons, to the COVID-19 vaccine hoarding witnessed world over. The theme for this year’s commemoration is a call to reflect and turn back to one of the most basic aspects of human rights ‘All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.’

In order to achieve inclusive development and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, there is need to address the engrained forms of discrimination that affect the most vulnerable and marginalised persons.

Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF) calls upon the Government of Uganda to ensure the observance and promotion of Article 21 of Uganda’s Constitution that guarantees the equality of all persons. We call upon the Government to adopt a human rights based approach to development to

realise the COVID-19 economic recovery programming. Equality, inclusion and non-discrimination is the only way to reduce inequalities and ensure a quick recovery from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

HRAPF also urges all Ugandans to respect the rights of all persons no matter how different they may be, for it is from the small places that human rights begin to matter. Unless human rights and dignity for all are recognised and respected, there can be no meaningful recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic will continue to ravage the country.

*Taking human rights to all*

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