

High-level meeting Action Alert

February 2021

2021 High-level meeting on HIV/AIDS: KEY THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW TO TAKE ACTION

This ACTION ALERT aims to inform civil society organizations about getting involved in the high-level meeting on HIV/AIDS, scheduled to happen in the United Nations in New York on June 8-10, 2021. This **ACTION ALERT** describes the process's essential features and focuses on civil society involvement opportunities. It also guides **key advocacy actions that you can take now**.

- In February 2021, the General Assembly approved [Resolution A/75/L.59](#) that sets out the process (modalities) for the organization of the 2021 high-level meeting (HLM) on AIDS, which will "undertake a comprehensive review of the progress on the commitments made in the 2016 Political Declaration towards ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030".
- The interactive multi-stakeholder hearing will take place no later than 15 April 2021 in preparation for the HLM session in June.
- In-person, virtual or hybrid, the meeting's format will be decided by April 2021 by the President of the General Assembly based on an assessment of the health conditions and in close consultation with the Member States. The proceedings will be webcast.
- The high-level meeting will comprise plenary sessions and up to five thematic panel discussions. The opening plenary meeting will feature statements by the President of the General Assembly, the UN Secretary-General, the Executive Director of UNAIDS, a person openly living with HIV and an eminent person actively engaged in the AIDS response.
- It is expected that the HLM Outcome Document adopted will be a concise and action-oriented declaration to be agreed upon by the Member States towards achieving the commitment of ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030. In the past, only the most contentious paragraphs were left to be approved at the HLM.

The level and extent of participation of civil society and key populations in the HLM have been at the center of the tensions during the Modalities Resolution negotiations. Several delegations disagreed with the paragraphs that included broader civil society participation and [mentioning 'key population'](#).

Non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and non-governmental members of the UNAIDS' PCB are invited to participate.

The President of the General Assembly will draw up a **list of representatives of other relevant non-governmental and civil society organizations** and send it to the Member States for their consideration on a non-objection basis. The General Assembly will approve the [final list](#).

According to the Modalities Resolution HLM resolution on modalities, Member States are **encouraged to include in their national delegations** representatives of civil society, including non-governmental organizations and organizations and networks representing people living with, at risk of and affected by HIV, persons in vulnerable situations and other relevant stakeholders.

It is anticipated that the negotiations for the new political declaration on HIV and AIDS will be even more difficult than the previous ones as the **geopolitical context is more challenging**. Covid-19 restrictions will substantially impact civil society's advocacy, both with New York Missions and capitals.

The next step for the co-facilitators (Australia and Namibia) will be to prepare a **zero draft** of the 2021 AIDS declaration. We do not yet have dates on when this will happen, but we need to start taking action now not to miss the 2016 gains and, as far as possible, achieve languages that will lead us to achieve more significant progress in responding to HIV across the world.

GET INVOLVED IN THE HIGH-LEVEL MEETING: KEY ADVOCACY ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE NOW

1. **Influence** your country's UN Mission's input. UN Missions in New York will negotiate the zero draft between now and the high-level meeting. It is critical to identify who represents your Mission in those negotiations and work in parallel to influence your capital decision-makers. The country Missions usually receive guidance from the Minister of Health and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Negotiations are done in English, and the time for translations is really short. To influence the negotiations, it is critical to be in **permanent contact with the Missions** in New York to be updated on your language on the evolving debates and plan your advocacy accordingly.
2. **Contact** key decision-makers in your government. Besides addressing the Minister of Health, it is always essential to contact the Minister of Foreign Affairs to establish (or strengthen) a relationship. It will allow you and your community sector colleagues to influence the input that the Mission in New York gives during the negotiation process through different channels. You can also channel this approach through the head of your AIDS Program, pushing them to support the areas you would like to influence.
3. **Advocate** for your government to send the **highest level of official representation – Ministries, President** and that the **delegation includes civil society representatives**, particularly from organizations of people living with HIV and key populations. You can contact other organizations in your country to develop a common strategy for this advocacy effort, including identifying individuals who would best represent issues relevant to the community sector [see Appendix 1 for a template letter].

Paragraph 5 of the Resolution *Encourages Member States to include in their national delegations to the high-level meeting ministers from all relevant ministries, as appropriate, representatives such as parliamentarians, mayors of cities significantly affected by HIV/AIDS, representatives of civil society, including non-governmental organizations and organizations and networks representing people living with, at risk of and affected by HIV, persons in vulnerable situations and other relevant stakeholders.*
4. **Influence** your government's participation at the high-level meeting by influencing their **statements before the meeting**. These deliberations must include the unique perspectives and experiences of the community sector.
5. **Contact accredited NGOs** directly once the list of accredited organizations is made public by the OPGA. It will also be posted on the [ICASO's website](https://www.icaso.org/) and widely distributed through different listservs.

If you have any input, ideas, questions, or concerns, please email HLM2021@icaso.org

Appendix 1: Sample Letter to national authority leading government involvement in the HLM

Mr./Ms./Dr.

[insert name]

[insert position]

[insert ministry/department]

Re: Civil society involvement in the national preparation for the 2021 high-level meeting on
HIV/AIDS

On behalf of [insert name of organization or group] and as members of civil society, I am writing to you to offer our support and request our involvement in the preparations toward the upcoming high-level meeting on HIV/AIDS that will take place at the United Nations in New York in June 2021.

This meeting represents a significant opportunity for all stakeholders in the global AIDS response to set bold new targets for HIV treatment, prevention, human rights and investment [add any other priority your group/population may have]. The representatives in New York that will be negotiating the outcome document in the weeks and months to come on behalf of our country must have the tools and support from the different country stakeholders. We want to offer our support for this.

Additionally, based on the General Assembly's Resolution, we would like to request that [insert name of country] be represented at the highest level. The national delegation must include civil society representatives, including non-governmental organizations and organizations and networks representing people living with HIV, women, young persons [insert here any other group/constituency].

The vital role that civil society organizations and people living with or affected by HIV and AIDS play in response to the epidemic provides a unique and grounded perspective and access to information invaluable to the delegation.

In closing, we would like to respectfully request a meeting with you and your staff to discuss our contribution and meaningful involvement in the negotiations leading up to the HLM and in the HLM as well. We are looking forward to hearing from you to arrange for a first meeting.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

[Your Organization/group's name and address]

[phone number and email address]