

Toronto, 20 May 2019

## **OPEN LETTER TO UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL ANTÓNIO GUTERRES**

### **RE: Three critical calls to action for bolder leadership in the global HIV response**

Dear Mr. Guterres,

ICASO commends you on the publication of your recent [progress report](#) regarding the implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the Political Declarations on HIV and AIDS.

Certainly, the report emphasizes some of the key achievements over the past decade and underscores ambitions still to be realized. In this regard, it is an important update for a large and diverse audience of member states and partners which make up the UN family and affiliates.

However, ICASO has deep concerns that the progress report either obscures or skirts a number of critical and systemic issues. The report's failure to adequately emphasize the vital role of communities, demand greater political will from our leaders, and condemn human rights violations, threatens to undo many of our collective gains to date.

ICASO is well-known for amplifying the voices of communities affected by HIV—voices which too often go unheard. We believe that your progress update greenlights complacency from our governments while undermining the hard work of those who are most affected and most vulnerable. We find this unacceptable.

We therefore call on you as the Secretary-General to demonstrate bolder leadership in the global HIV response in the following three ways:

#### **Call to Action 1: Acknowledge the vital role of the community response to HIV**

- ICASO is alarmed that the progress report does not mention the target to expand community-led service delivery to cover at least 30 per cent of all service delivery by 2030. We call upon the UN leadership to measure progress and impact from the expansion of community-led service delivery, including coverage and cost-effectiveness of services.
- The greater involvement and meaningful engagement of people living with HIV in the global response are unique and significant globally endorsed principles. The pivotal role of people living with HIV gets little more than a nod in the reports' closing. Of note, your progress update misses the opportunity to spotlight the critical importance of the U=U message (undetectable equals untransmissible)—which UNAIDS has endorsed. U=U was developed by people living with HIV, borne out of their tireless participation in scientific and clinical research. The U=U campaign has had profound effects upon reducing HIV-related stigma and

discrimination around the world and is but one example of how people living with HIV and their communities of support are making a significant and tangible difference to the global response.

### **Call to Action 2: Sound louder alarm for the inadequate resourcing of the global response**

- An urgent call must be issued to all member states to increase their domestic funding of key populations and human rights programs. We believe your progress update's statement that "steady increases in both domestic and international funding have supported a massive expansion of evidence-informed and human rights-based programmes" lets our governments off the hook. Programs which serve key populations and address human rights-related barriers are heavily reliant on (decreasing) external assistance. This must change.
- We are astonished that your progress report's section on 'Insufficient Investments' does not highlight key gaps in HIV prevention spending. The Political Declaration commits countries to ensuring that financial resources for prevention are adequate and constitute no less than a quarter of AIDS spending. An update on this commitment is absent from your report. UNAIDS has—in the past—championed this call for "a quarter for prevention". This message must remain central in all HIV investment updates.
- It is within the remit of the UN to demand greater accountability from the Global Fund and other major international funding partners about sustainability, transition and co-financing policies which create a "Procurement Cliff" for life-saving drugs. ICASO is concerned that such policies expand the mandate for national procurement sooner than expected or planned for many countries. This negatively affects quality, availability, and affordability of drugs and diagnostics. We call on you to require improved planning, risk assessment and mitigation.

### **Call to Action 3: Condemn criminalization and the barriers to access that it causes**

- The UN must make a bolder call for countries to repeal the harmful laws and policies that unjustly criminalize people living with HIV and key populations. If you truly intend to leave no one behind, then you must be prepared to call out and name the detrimental effects that these laws and policies have on ending HIV. For instance, your report notes that "Laws and policies that criminalize same-sex sexual relationships still exist in more than 68 countries," but fails to mention how criminalization of same-sex sexuality is associated with poor HIV service coverage. Your report says "Sex work is criminalized in more than 116 countries", yet leaves out how decriminalization could avert nearly half of new infections over the next decade.
- Global momentum behind the 90-90-90 targets is significant. However, a progress report which only highlights country-level cascade data obscures population-specific service access inequities. We call on countries to collect, and the UN to report on, 90-90-90 data for men who have sex with men, sex workers, transgender people, people who inject drugs, prisoners,



young people, indigenous populations, adolescent girls and young women, and other criminalized or marginalized groups.

Finally, ICASO has been deeply invested in monitoring the ongoing humanitarian emergency engulfing the country of Venezuela, in particular, the impact this is having on the most vulnerable, including people living with and most affected by HIV. We implore you as the Secretary-General to respond to the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela as such, by deploying all the political, strategic and diplomatic mechanisms at your disposal and to guarantee the continuing role of the community sector in the policy and programmatic decisions the UN makes on Venezuela.

The lives of millions depend on these changes. We demand bolder and more transparent leadership and accountability.

Sincerely,

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