

# Action for Universal Access 2010: Myths and Realities



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Sara Speicher, 1-917-499-1540, media@ua2010.org

## Coalition Calls for Elimination of Travel Restrictions for HIV-Positive Travelers

*US, China among governments called to task*

More than 70 governments including the United States, China, South Korea, Singapore, and many countries in the Middle East are being urged to eliminate travel restrictions imposed on people living with HIV at an upcoming United Nations (UN) meeting on AIDS.

A letter signed by over 345 organizations and addressed to heads of state and UN missions asks governments to publicly lift such restrictions during the UN High Level Review on AIDS in New York, June 10-11. HIV-related travel restrictions “are increasingly obsolete and discriminatory in a world with more access to treatment and ever-increasing mobility,” states the letter.

“The enemy is the virus, not the persons living with it”, emphasizes Gracia Violeta Ross, a member of the Developing Countries NGO Delegation on the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria Board. “As governments and civil society representatives meet to review the progress made in achieving the world’s promise to ensuring universal access to treatment, care, support and prevention by 2010, it is shameful and unjust that people living with HIV are denied the opportunity to contribute their expertise, experience and commitment to stop this epidemic.”

The letter highlights that such travel restrictions are most obvious during international conferences on HIV and AIDS, such as the upcoming UN meeting, where people living with HIV face being denied entry or entering a lengthy and intrusive process to be granted a special visa waiver.

Non-US citizens living with HIV have been denied from entering or transiting through the United States since 1987. Those wishing to enter to attend conferences, conduct business, or visit family must apply for an HIV visa waiver, a process that may take three months or longer, requires a personal interview at the US Embassy and places a permanent mark in the person’s passport. On World AIDS Day 2006, US President George W. Bush announced that he planned to implement a permanent categorical waiver that would allow people living with HIV to enter the United States for short stays. This promise has not been fulfilled.

Travel restrictions, which range from requiring travelers to declare their HIV status to banning short and long term visits, were instituted to prevent the spread of HIV when AIDS was first identified in the early 1980s.

Countries that continue to impose restrictions cite public health concerns or the potential economic costs of providing health care and social services to people living with HIV and AIDS.

However, the letter underscores that in reality these restrictions “undermine HIV prevention and other efforts to stop the epidemic” as such restrictions encourage people to withhold information about their status, and that there has been no “demonstrated proof” that there is a “huge negative economic impact on countries without travel restrictions.”

The letter is currently signed by over 345 organizations from around the world, and the list continues to grow. Supporting organizations include major national and international organizations working in the response to HIV and AIDS, human rights organizations, international and national networks of positive people, medical institutions and societies, youth organizations and coalitions, labor institutions, and faith-based organizations.

### **For further information**

The full text of the letter and current list of signatures can be found at:

<http://www.ua2010.org/en/UNGASS/Press-Centre>

Media are welcome to attend a side meeting about travel restrictions during the UN meeting:

*Entry Denied: What You Need to Know about HIV-Related Travel Restrictions*

Organized by the International AIDS Society, the Ford Foundation, Gay Men’s Health Crisis, UNAIDS, and the members of the Civil Society Task Force

Tuesday, 10 June, 1:15-2:45 pm, UN Conference Room 4.

Lunch will be provided on a first come first served basis.

UN accreditation required for entry.

For more information or to set up interviews on the impact of travel restrictions email: [media@ua2010.org](mailto:media@ua2010.org) or call:

Callie Long, International Council of AIDS Service Organizations (ICASO): 1-647-267-9813

Kelly Castagnaro, International Women’s Health Coalition (IWHC): 1-646-707-1004

Sara Speicher, Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA): 1-917-499-1540