

# Action for Universal Access 2010: Myths and Realities



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, 12 June 2008

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**“We are all connected”**

*Tackling exclusion key to effective global response to AIDS*

Representatives of key at-risk populations have urged governments and the United Nations (UN) to strengthen connections across all sectors in the response to HIV and AIDS.

“We are all connected,” stated Robert Carr, Caribbean Vulnerable Communities Coalition. “While today we are speaking about particularly affected communities, it is important to realize that today’s concentrated epidemic is tomorrow’s generalized epidemic.”

Five representatives of civil society organizations participating in the UN High Level Meeting on AIDS spoke at a press conference on June 11, focusing on the exclusion of marginalized and at-risk populations and the need for civil society to be fully involved in the response to AIDS at all levels.

“Am I invisible?” asked Laxminarayan Tripathi of ASTITVA, an organization for the support and development of sexual minorities. “We transgenders are treated as untouchables around the world,” she said. “When will we start being human again and be treated as such?”

Tripathi stated that HIV adds another layer of stigma to often marginalized groups, a layer that Meena Seshu, who works with sex workers on HIV prevention and education in India, said is counter to fighting the pandemic.

“Sex workers are one of the groups of people who we should trust to stop the pandemic, but as long as we keep looking down on sex workers, this will not happen,” said Seshu. “Populations that are marginalized and experience discrimination need to be shown that they too can fight HIV—that’s the model we should adopt.”

Speakers reiterated the goal, set by UN member states in 2006, to reach universal access to treatment, prevention, support and care by 2010, a goal which can only be attained by ensuring human rights for all.

“There will be no universal access for people who use drugs if our human rights are consistently violated,” said Stijn Goossein, International Network of People Who Use Drugs. He explained that even within the UN system there is a disconnect in the approach to at-risk populations. In some instances, groups such as people who use drugs are lumped in programs on crime and terrorism.

Rev. J.P. Heath of the International Network of Religious Leaders Living with or Personally Affected by HIV, noting recent calls to do away with HIV-related travel restrictions said, “science has moved on, human rights initiatives have moved on, management of HIV has moved on, but stuck in the legal systems of over 70 countries around the world are still laws and policies which are antiquated, irrational, ineffective, and outdated.”

The same holds true for people’s responses in their daily lives. Tripathi explained that the prevalence of stigma and discrimination is where the real challenge still lies, and where some groups continue to be “isolated” in the myth that this will make them and the virus invisible.

### **For further information**

More information for the media on civil society statements and actions during the High Level meeting can be found at:

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

For more information or to set up interviews email [media@ua2010.org](mailto:media@ua2010.org) or call:

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