



High Level Meeting on Ending AIDS – A half-hearted declaration does not acknowledge the leading role of communities and NGOs

The United Nations intend to expand their engagement in order to end AIDS by 2030. That was the consensus of the declaration the member states adopted in the opening of the UN High Level Meeting in New York on ending AIDS. Before, there had been a political controversy because some countries, among them Russia, refused to support certain statements regarding sexuality and drug use.

For the first time, the UN declared that in particular key populations, namely, men who have sex with men, trans* persons, intravenous drug users, sex workers and prisoners, need support. The declaration states that the human rights of these groups must be respected. Key populations need to be protected against discrimination and in regards to their right for suitable prevention measures and access to treatment. People in all countries can now invoke this declaration. Human rights are the basis for prevention.

However, the declaration, as in the case of all UN documents, applies only where national legislation is not infringed. That means that useful and needed harm reduction measures such as opiate substitution therapy and needle syringe exchange will still not be implemented in countries that criminalize drug users and it remains impossible to speak openly about homosexuality where LGBTI people are prosecuted.

AIDS will not be ended unless key populations are meaningfully involved on all levels of interventions, prevention, testing, and treatment and care. The declaration is far from what communities and civil society would expect from a strong, visionary declaration. The leading role of communities and NGOs in the HIV response is not meaningfully recognized in the document. While even more harmful restrictions in the declaration by countries could be prevented, the exclusion of certain key population representing organisations and networks could not be reversed. This is unacceptable.

Lilianne Ploumen, Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Netherlands who spoke on behalf of the European Union, reaffirmed in her statement that the EU would have appreciated a much stronger language in the declaration and regretted that Civil Society Organisations were excluded. She ensured the commitment of the European Union, in its neighbouring countries and worldwide.

Sini Pasanen, co-Chair of the EU HIV/AIDS Civil Society Forum for AIDS Action Europe is optimistic regarding the commitments of the European Union: “Now it is the time for the European Commission and the Member States to show leadership in meeting the 90-90-90 targets. Civil Society Organisations will remain a reliable partner as we have been in the past 35 years in order to end the epidemic by 2030.”

To end AIDS by 2030, the UN intend to reduce the number of infections with their commitment to the 90-90-90 targets. To meet this goal, the budget for interventions in the developing countries must rise from 19 to 26 billion dollars. From 2017 to 2019, the GFATM will need to receive 13 billion Dollars. And 25 % of the globally applied funds in the response to HIV/AIDS are to be used for prevention. Bryan Teixeira, Chair of the EATG Policy Working Group comments: “The two fundamental aspects for me are human rights and funding. On the human rights front, the HLM’s political declaration has been mediocre. As far as funding is concerned, what we urgently need is a kind of early-warning system that monitors the delivery of the needed funding by domestic as well as international sources. Without a significant frontloading of funding in the coming 5 years, we will not make our 2030 targets.”

The EU HIV/AIDS Civil Society Forum (CSF) is an informal advisory body established in 2005 by the European Commission to facilitate the participation of NGOs and networks, including those representing People Living with HIV/AIDS, in European policy development and implementation as well as to exchange information.