

*Executive Director*

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Advocates for universal access  
to HIV prevention, treatment,  
care and support in Eastern  
Europe and Central Asia

5 May 2014

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for your recent communications expressing concern regarding the AIDS response in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA) in the context of the upcoming 4th EECAAC Conference in Moscow. As the Co-Chair of the Conference, I am grateful for your sincere and timely input, which I have also shared with the other conference co-chairs and the members of the conference organizing committee (COC).

In the current context, I appreciate that it may appear easier for me not to participate in the conference person and only issue a UNAIDS media statement. However I fear that my absence would only exacerbate a polarized debate on HIV in EECA at a pivotal time, and risk to undermine UNAIDS ability to advocate for people affected by the HIV epidemic in this region, including, most significantly, people who inject drugs.

UNAIDS remains committed to the urgent need to halt and reverse the AIDS epidemic in EECA. I strongly believe that the upcoming EECAAC Conference can serve as a timely and credible platform to highlight the challenging status of the AIDS response in the region. UNAIDS position and suggestion on the issues raised in your letter were recently expressed at the COC meeting in Moscow on 4 April 2014.

Let me inform you on the recent steps taken by UNAIDS in this regard:

1. While UNAIDS respects the prerogative of organizations and individuals to decide whether to participate in the conference, UNAIDS has officially requested the COC to reach out to non-governmental organizations, civil society, and people living with HIV from across EECA to encourage their unrestricted participation in the conference. In this respect, UNAIDS welcomes the recent statement from the civil society members of the COC recognizing the essential role of UNAIDS and other international organizations in the conference:

[http://eeacaac2014.org/system/docs/files/000/000/038/original/%D0%9C%D0%B8%D1%88%D0%B5%D0%BB%D1%8E\\_%D0%A1%D0%B8%D0%B4%D0%B8%D0%B1%D0%B5\\_final\\_EN.docx?1398087846](http://eeacaac2014.org/system/docs/files/000/000/038/original/%D0%9C%D0%B8%D1%88%D0%B5%D0%BB%D1%8E_%D0%A1%D0%B8%D0%B4%D0%B8%D0%B1%D0%B5_final_EN.docx?1398087846)

UNAIDS considers that any barriers to the meaningful participation of civil society in the conference, including organizations that represent

UNAIDS  
JOINT UNITED NATIONS  
PROGRAMME ON HIV/AIDS

UNHCR  
UNICEF  
WFP  
UNDP  
UNFPA  
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UN WOMEN  
ILO  
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people living with HIV, drug users, LGBTI, sex workers, migrants, should be avoided, and welcomes special provisions being made by the Russian Government and the COC to facilitate their participation. UNAIDS has been assured by the representative of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the COC that foreigners living with HIV will be able to attend the conference without restrictions. In order to encourage a breakthrough on this issue, I have written officially to the President of the Russian Federation, encouraging a decision by the Russian Government to lift restrictions on the entry, stay and residence of foreigners living with HIV-infection.

2. UNAIDS insists that the conference features an open and evidence-based discussion of policy and programmatic responses to the AIDS epidemic. While UNAIDS respects the sovereign right of countries to pursue different policy approaches, our position and recommendations remain clear and unequivocal. In my opening speech at the conference, I plan to reiterate UNAIDS position and highlight our concerns on the rights of LGBT people, people who inject drugs, sex workers, the meaningful involvement of key affected populations and civil society, HIV prevention, and people living with HIV in need of treatment. I will also emphasize that UNAIDS and its Cosponsors continue to work with the Russian Federation and other countries to implement effective programmes consistent with international best practice and UNAIDS policies and recommendations.
3. UNAIDS is deeply concerned about ensuring continuity of access to HIV services, including OST, for all patients in Crimea and has written to the Russian Ministry of Health to convey our concerns on this issue. The situation with people who inject drugs and HIV response in Crimea will be given special attention in the conference programme and will be discussed during a dedicated session.

In conclusion, I am very grateful for your concern and engagement regarding the upcoming 4th EECAAC Conference in Moscow. I count on your continued engagement to ensure a positive outcome on these issues, which are critical to the future of the AIDS response in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

Yours sincerely,



Michel Sidibé