

December 9th, 2017

JOINT STATEMENT FROM ACTIVISTS PRESENT AT 19TH ICASA (ABIDJAN, 4-9 DECEMBER 2017)

Addressed to African govts and donors:

We community activists and people living with HIV attending this ICASA Conference today 9th December 2017, would like to share our great disappointment about the engagement and treatment of communities and PLHIV during this ICASA conference. The voice of civil society should be one that is not negotiated or stifled at international conferences.

During the Conference HIV activists from around the world were blocked from peacefully demonstrating and making their voices heard. The Hotel and security forcefully prevented activists from entering the conference venue during and after a peaceful demonstration.

Civil Society should be allowed to be able to share important messages affecting the communities without fear of not being allowed back into the conference because of speaking boldly. During this ICASA the Voice of civil society was silenced and not heard and communities and PLHIV are demanding an apology from the conference organisers for this never to happen again.

Activism is and should be an integral part of the ICASA Conferences and no way should communities and Civil Society have to beg for space and for their voices to be peacefully heard. CSO'S reject the accusations that they were blocked because they threatened political leaders and their representatives.

During the conference a lot of civil society organisations specifically from the community of people who inject drugs and those living with HIV in general who had their abstracts accepted could not put up posters because there was not enough space and more priority was given to other researchers.

During the conference, SOME young activists and PLHIV were only given half of their scholarship allowances, among communities we had to give money to our fellow scholarship recipients as they had not received yet their money for food

People living with HIV could not access the meals in the positive lounge without declaring their status and this infringes on the rights of the people living with HIV. Some were told to pay for meals

We are gravely disappointed by the decision of the conference organisers to not have a Human Rights Networking Zone at this ICASA despite commitment from the Secretariat and common practice in previous conferences. Now more than ever, human rights are key for the HIV response. We are afraid that the decision to exclude a human rights networking zone sends a clear message that providing a space for communities to discuss human rights related challenges they experience on a daily basis and exploring solutions to these challenges is not a priority for the conference organisers. We would like the secretariat to clarify this decision.

HIV is still a Crisis! The pandemic is not over and as communities we cannot just sit and watch people come to a conference, behave and act as if it's another gathering!!! Spend a lot of money on fancy cocktails, meetings and receptions while the affected are ignored on our backs!!! A good casing point and area of concern is that only 1 in 4 adults in and 1 in 10 children in the West and Central Africa region have access to ARVs, while people are dying still of AIDS in the era of test and start! While service users in the West and Central Africa region are asked to pay for consultations, tests, and other

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services in order to access care ...preventing many from accessing the lifesaving treatment that they need while children and youth are neglected.

We People living with HIV demand accountability and a report on the revenues generated from the ICASA conferences and how it has been used. We also demand a report detailing the conference outcomes, lessons learned and best practices to inform and support continuing advocacy initiatives at national and regional level. More important is that, we do not want the only space we have as people living with HIV to be a joke and just another meeting after which everyone goes back home to business as usual!!!!

We demand that the mistakes made at this conference never to be repeated again. We want reassurance and an apology that this will never happen again!

Our message to our leaders is that human rights should go hand in hand with service delivery if we are going to achieve 90 90 90 targets by 2020. Stigma, discrimination, legal and policy barriers and our reluctance to include civil society and community in improving and expanding the HIV response reduces our capacity to reach populations with much needed services.

We have key populations, young women and girls who require greater attention in response but who are still unable to access services because they are criminalised and their human rights are violated every day. We demand commitment from leaders to ensure all populations access services without fear of arrest and or discrimination.

We need commitment from donors to put funds into the Global Fund and the US Congress to increase funds to PEPFAR to ensure continued scale up of treatment and access to services

Years after African governments made the commitments to increase domestic funding for health to 15% of national budgets, the commitment made by our leaders is yet to be fulfilled by most governments. While we call for increased domestic funding, that should not mean that donors should step away from this journey that they have been walking with Africa countries.

We are particularly concerned with the current transitioning of countries to middle income status. As countries transition, we have to ensure that we don't leave people behind in these countries without means to access high quality medication due to high commodity prices such as DTG. Most countries still need support from donors to ensure continuity of quality services.

We need a commitment from both our governments and donors to increase investment in human resources for health and community systems; and strengthening the procurement and supply chain systems. The initiative of 2 million health workers by African Union will not be possible if we do not put resources so that we consistently support our health workers to provide services. We call on governments, donors and all in the HIV response to keep people living with HIV at the centre of the response. Despite test and Start, many lives continue to be lost to the epidemic.

WALK THE TALK, ENOUGH OF RHETORIC, WE NEED MONEY AND NOT JUST TALK. Communities are watching you and will hold you accountable!!! NOTHING FOR US WITHOUT US! HIV IS STILL A CRISIS AND IS NOT OVER!

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