



WORLD AIDS DAY



MESSAGE

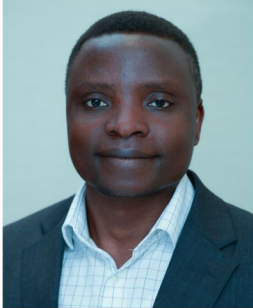


Eamonn Murphy
Regional Director for Asia Pacific and Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regions at UNAIDS

As head of World AIDS Day (1 December), UNAIDS urges leaders to protect the human rights of everyone living with, and at risk of, HIV. Only then can the world meet the goal of ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030. A new report, “Take the rights path to end AIDS”, notes that despite huge progress made in the HIV response, human rights violations are leading to the denial or limitation of access to HIV services. “When there is impunity for gender-based violence, when people can be arrested for who they are, when a visit to health services is dangerous for people because of the community they are from—the result is that people are blocked from HIV services that are essential to save their lives and to end the AIDS pandemic,” said Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director of UNAIDS. “To protect everyone’s health, we need to protect everyone’s rights.” Globally, every minute a

person dies due to AIDS. Almost quarter of the estimated 39.9 million people living with HIV are still not accessing life-saving treatment. And in at least 28 countries, new HIV infections are on the rise. It is imperative that HIV prevention, testing and treatment programmes can be reached without fear by all who need them. The criminalisation and stigmatisation of marginalised communities continue to block access to life-saving HIV services. In the 2021 Political Declaration on Ending HIV and AIDS, countries committed to ensure that by 2025 less than ten percent of countries have punitive laws and policies and less than ten percent of people living with HIV (PLHIV) and key populations experience stigma and discrimination. (The key populations are communities at higher risk for HIV, including men who have sex with men, people in prisons and other closed settings, people who use drugs, sex workers and transgender people.)

In Asia and the Pacific there are 17 AIDS-related deaths every hour and a new HIV infection every two minutes. From 2010 to 2023, new infections increased in Bangladesh (20%), Lao PDR (23%), Papua New Guinea (104%), Afghanistan (175%), Fiji (241%) and the Philippines (543%). Four of the six countries worldwide where infections have surged by more than 100% since 2010 are in this region. “Instead of punishing marginalised communities, governments need to uphold their human rights and ensure they have the specific information and care they require,” said Eamonn Murphy, Regional Director of UNAIDS Asia Pacific and Eastern Europe Central Asia. “The HIV response is at a crossroads. What governments do now will set the trajectory for whether we end AIDS as a public health threat and achieve a sustainable AIDS response, or whether we fail to achieve this and pay a much higher price in terms of human life and financial costs in the future.” There are legal barriers to the HIV response across Asia Pacific. Twenty countries criminalize HIV transmission, exposure or non-disclosure while 14 restrict the entry, stay or residence of people living with HIV. All but one country, New Zealand, criminalise some aspect of sex work. Seventeen criminalise same-sex relations and 28 criminalise drug possession.



Trouble Chikoko.
Country Director for UNAIDS Pakistan and Afghanistan

Taking the rights path—the theme for this year’s World AIDS Day is representative of the precipice we stand at globally. As the movement against human rights is gaining momentum, we need more resources, heightened passion and a committed focus to upholding the rights of all. The only way we can achieve the end of AIDS as a public health threat by 2030 is if everyone’s rights are protected. The Joint UN Programme for HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) stands as an ally for our front-line fighters, our communities and the key populations as we bring the focus back to human rights and foster a human centered approach, reinstating the need for letting communities’ lead. Since the first positive person in Pakistan was identified in 1987, the unfortunate case of unsafe blood transfusion; the country has gone through a total of 8 major outbreaks across Punjab and Sindh, the most recent one of which was in Mirpur Khas where 27 children under the age of three were tested positive until June 2024. This trend from Sindh is very alarming as it draws attention to a stark observation—a surge of up to 260 new infections from the province every month, with about 15% children testing positive. In another more recent incidence of negligence at Nishtar Hospital in Multan, Punjab, 30 dialysis patients were infected with HIV, and one died because the administration

failed to follow the safe pre and post dialysis treatment procedures. According to the estimates from 2023, an approximate number of 290,000 people are currently living with HIV—however this may not be representative of the actual disease burden as most far to reach areas do not have access to blood screening let alone basic health services. To end AIDS, we need to reach out to and engage with everyone who is living with, at risk for or affected by HIV—especially those who have been most excluded and marginalized. This involves including those areas geographically where we have not had an outreach; but also engage in a wider sector

and any other form of income generation was inaccessible to her as employers did not want to associate with her past. However, Gogi, knowing she had to live with this, found support from her friends and community members. She became a role model for those like her, uplifted herself and then began awareness sessions for her communities to empower them with knowledge. In both instances we are only reading about a fraction of discrimination and violations of their basic rights that they endured simply because those around them didn’t want to accept them. All is not bleak though as we have stories of courage such as Gogi’s and many others like her to accept their own selves and create space through their actions for everyone to be accepted. UNAIDS has been actively working in Pakistan to promote and protect human rights for those living with and at risk of HIV through advocacy, coordination and technical support. However, the rise in human rights violations which are more extreme for those living with HIV and our key populations because of their increased vulnerability from exclusion and internal/external stigma, have become a cause for concern. On this World Aid’s Day- we call upon all of you to come together with empathy and compassion and treat others as we ought to be treated ourselves- with love and non-judgement. Let’s work together to ensure that no one is left behind as we continue to mitigate and address the human rights violation- let’s keep on raising our voices for the change we hope to achieve. Let’s take the path of upholding human rights, letting the communities lead the change.

tested positive for HIV? These are very real-life examples from our provinces. We de-humanize the person, regardless of their background, behavior and gender. Mani, a fictional character in a real story, when diagnosed with HIV in a large urban city went into extreme depression as he was tested positive after having flu-like symptoms for three months. He feared what his family would say as his uncle, a drug user, had passed away from AIDS and experienced high humiliation and exclusion by his family. Mani was a very shy boy who had joined the development sector to help people like his uncle, and in an episode where he was



response that places HIV as a priority for multi-hierarchical stakeholders. We have so many examples of people who, when diagnosed with HIV, have suffered gross violations and experienced extreme isolation simply because we begin to associate them with our perception of their behaviors forgetting their basic right to live as a human being. What about that five-year-old child who got diagnosed with HIV after he went for a haircut to a barber that used unsterilized blades on his clients? Or what about a woman who got affected because her husband was a drug user, and her two daughters who at the age of 18 and 22 were transmitted by their mother through using hand knitting needles? What about a young girl that is raped and then

disposing of used syringes, one syringe poked out of the garbage bag and pierced his hand. It took a lot of counselling for his family to accept him and allow him to stay in the same house so he can have access to basic social support. However, despite a decade of this incident, Mani to date suffers stigma at his homeplace, more so by his nieces and nephews who refuse to share utensils or eat in the same space as him out of fear of being affected by him. This is just one example and aspect of the life of someone that is living with HIV. In another example, Gogi was kidnapped as a young girl and sold at a brothel where she was diagnosed with HIV a few years later. She lost her work,

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Every Minute, One **Life** at Risk - **39.9 Million** Still Living with **AIDS**. Act Now



Get in touch with the Association of People Living With HIV - Pakistan
Toll Free Number: **0800 22209**