



September 19, 2018

Dr. Michel Sidibé  
Executive Director  
UNAIDS  
20, ave. Appia  
1211 Geneva, Switzerland

Dear Michel:

**Re: Leadership in addressing sexual harassment and assault**

Thank you for meeting with the members of the UNAIDS Reference Group on HIV and Human Rights in attendance at the International AIDS Conference in Amsterdam in July. We are writing to follow-up on our discussion during the meeting regarding the measures UNAIDS is currently taking to ensure a workplace free of sexual abuse, exploitation and harassment. As we expressed at the meeting, the past year has been a challenging time for the organization and staff, and we are writing to you out of our desire, and commitment, to see UNAIDS not only at the forefront of the global response to HIV, but also at the forefront of UN agencies in promoting gender equity and human rights and defending against harassment and impunity. We are also concerned that UNAIDS' public response to the recent allegations of sexual harassment or assault has failed to acknowledge the widespread nature of the problem across the UN.

While we did not discuss specific figures at our meeting, the number of allegations of across the UN system are shocking: Between 1 April-30 June 2018, a three-month period, the UN received 70 allegations of abuse, including 43 involving UN personnel and 27 involving non-UN personnel working for implementing partners or non-UN international forces authorized by a Security Council mandate. Of the 70 allegations, 18 are categorized as sexual abuse, 46 as sexual exploitation, 3 as other and 3 are of an unknown nature. There are 84 victims: 46 women, 17 girls (under the age of 18), 12 women whose age is unknown, 1 boy (under the age of 18), and 5 men of an unknown age. The sex of 3 victims is unknown. Alleged perpetrators include 80 men, 4 women, and 4 individuals whose sex is unknown. These figures demonstrate that sexual harassment and assault spans the entire UN system and that there is an urgent need for the UN to ensure that systems are in place to investigate claims and hold individuals responsible to account.

Given the history and mission of UNAIDS and the central role that gender inequality and human rights abuses play in the effectiveness of the HIV response, we urge UNAIDS, as an entity forged in human rights principles, to address this crisis by leading by example. We urge you to continue to speak out about ending sexual harassment and abuse, and to speak out even louder. UNAIDS is uniquely positioned within the UN system as an organization that has strong expertise and exceptional

## UNAIDS Reference Group on HIV and Human Rights

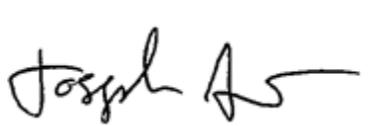
partnerships with NGOs and communities working to end discrimination and protect rights. We regret that we were not engaged further in providing you guidance and advice over the last year to address the allegations that have arisen and to support your implementation of reforms and we wish to underscore in this letter that we are available at any time to provide you with guidance and feedback.

As we noted in our recent discussion with you, our expectation of you as the leader of an agency that is perceived by many to be in crisis, is to rise above the detail of individual cases of sexual harassment and abuse of power to display leadership among UN executive directors in the call for reforms and to make strong principled statements about a zero tolerance approach to sexual harassment and abuse of power and to lead by example even in difficult and often complex human resource management situations. The strength of UNAIDS has been its staff and its strong partnerships with civil society. When individuals in positions of power are able to act with impunity, or to use threats and intimidation to silence criticism, the credibility of the organization and hence its ability to achieve its goals is jeopardized.

Being committed to the reforms you have made means anticipating that more complaints will be alleged, via a formal complaint or not. The success of the AIDS movement has been the willingness of brave individuals to raise uncomfortable truths, and it is critical that you ensure that your staff have faith that they can raise their complaints without improper retaliation, and with a guarantee of a prompt, effective, professional response.

We appreciate that our call is for a stronger approach by you and UNAIDS. We also understand that an accusation, of itself, is not proof of its truth and accuracy. Due process and natural justice must be given to those who are accused, in accordance with human rights principles. However, in the past, the balance within the United Nations and UNAIDS has not been just, effective and supportive where it should have been. We look to you to strongly recalibrate that balance and to insist upon the consequent programmatic changes that will ensure that all complaints are taken seriously; properly recorded; effectively investigated; and followed up with firm, prompt and where appropriate public outcomes. The UNAIDS Reference Group on HIV and Human Rights will be available to you and to the Independent Expert Panel review to provide advice and assistance on the essential programmatic changes.

Yours sincerely,



Joseph Amon and Michaela Clayton  
Co-chairs

*Executive Director*

Reference: EXO/2018/512

Dr Joe Amon  
Ms Michaela Clayton  
Co-Chairs of UNAIDS Reference Group  
on HIV and Human Rights

5 October 2018

Dear Co-Chairs and members of the UNAIDS Reference Group on HIV and Human Rights,

Thank you for your letter following our meeting in Amsterdam. I appreciate your frankness, openness and continued engagement, as well as your powerful calls to ensure that UNAIDS – and the United Nations as a whole – live up to their promise of upholding and defending the rights and dignity of every person, both within and outside of the UN. The response to HIV has always drawn its strength and legitimacy from human rights, as well as community empowerment and participation, and our approach now will continue to honour this legacy.

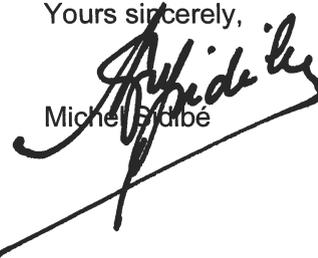
I embrace your request that I rise above the constraints of bureaucracy to uphold our obligations and the commitments we have made, and to ensure justice is not only done, but that people can see justice being done. I assure you that I will be doing everything in my power to make this happen and to insist that the measures we introduce are not merely rhetorical but are implemented. You will know from our meeting that we are already taking important steps: from an improved recruiting and hiring methodology, to enhanced performance reviews designed to assess the whole person, to new trainings for organizational cultural changes—all as part of a comprehensive set of meaningful measures to address sexual harassment and abuse of power.

I am pleased, too, that the Independent Expert Panel is conducting its review, and I hope it will deliver recommendations that will allow us to improve further and serve as a model for the UN system more broadly. I also hope that the Panel will recommend measures to strengthen mechanisms for reporting, investigating and safeguarding the rights of victims of abuse. Finally, I hope and expect that you have engaged with the Panel to provide your recommendations. Your support, as UNAIDS implements recommendations that I expect will emerge from the Panel's work, will be critical.

Within UNAIDS, I have initiated an open dialogue to listen to staff and to hear the perspectives and concerns of every single member of the UNAIDS family who would like to share. Our meetings to date have been inspiring and instructive. I am committed to implementing excellent recommendations that come directly from UNAIDS staff, including the tackling of harmful expressions of masculinity and unconscious biases that impact women, while recognizing of course that sexual harassment and abuse of power cut across all boundaries and must be addressed wherever they arise.

As always, I thank you for your offer to advise us in our efforts. I am counting on your assistance in our work ahead.

Yours sincerely,



Michel Sidibé

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