Leadership on human rights: Questions for candidates for the position of UNAIDS Executive Director

The fundamental importance of human rights to the HIV response

We have the evidence and tools to achieve the goals of zero new HIV cases, zero AIDS deaths and zero discrimination. UNAIDS has a key role to play in marshalling and sustaining the political commitment and necessary resources to overcome the epidemic and ensure that, consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals, “no one is left behind.” But without respecting, protecting and fulfilling the human rights of people living with HIV and of key populations particularly affected by the epidemic, we will simply not be able to achieve the goal of ending AIDS by 2030. Defending and promoting human rights is not merely an obligation of UN Member States and agencies; it is also key to the HIV response—practical, life-saving and economical. UN Member States themselves have repeatedly declared in every Political Declaration on the matter that the full realization of human rights for all “is an essential element in the global response to the HIV epidemic, including in the areas of prevention, treatment, care and support.” The Joint Programme has played, and must play, an important role in articulating a human rights–based approach to HIV and in defining what it means for policy and practice.

Key questions for candidates for the position of UNAIDS Executive Director

The UNAIDS Reference Group on HIV and Human Rights takes this opportunity to identify a number of questions that should be raised with all candidates being considered for the position of UNAIDS Executive Director:

☐ What do you see as the importance of human rights in the response to HIV, globally and at country level?

☐ As countries seek to achieve “epidemic transition,” what are the key human rights concerns that are most important to address, including for specific populations and communities particularly affected by HIV?

☐ How should attention to human rights—including gender equality—be organized within the UNAIDS Secretariat and the Joint Programme? Do you think this work should be expanded, reduced, or maintained at about the same level it is currently?

☐ How will you address the concerns and recommendations regarding sexual harassment, bullying and abuse of power within the UNAIDS Secretariat that have been laid out in the report of the Independent Expert Panel released last year? As the head of the UNAIDS Secretariat, how would you ensure transparency in management’s efforts to address those concerns and ensure a workplace that is safe and respectful?
About the Reference Group

The UNAIDS Reference Group on HIV and Human Rights was established in 2002 to provide expert advice to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) on all matters relating to HIV and human rights, reflecting the fact that respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights is essential to an effective HIV response and is a cross-cutting issue of relevance to many different areas of the work of the Joint Programme.

The membership of the Reference Group brings together people from the HIV and human rights community, including advocates, jurists, ethicists, people living with HIV, people working in the NGO and community sectors, people working in the government sector, people working with faith communities, and academics.

The Reference Group speaks with an independent voice; its views do not necessarily reflect the views of the UNAIDS Secretariat or any of the UNAIDS Cosponsors.