



April 16, 2021

Dr. Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director
Dr. Karusa Kiragu, Alignment Coordinator
UNAIDS Secretariat

Dear Dr. Byanyima, Dear Dr. Kiragu:

Re: Recommendations for realignment of UNAIDS Secretariat and Joint Programme

We hope this letter finds you and yours safe and well.

On behalf of UNAIDS' [Reference Group on HIV and Human Rights](#), we offer our congratulations on the successful adoption of the new global strategy, *End Inequalities, End AIDS* at the recent meeting of the Programme Coordinating Board. As you know, the Reference Group provided input in several ways during the development of the strategy and welcomes the strong commitment to human rights, including the focus on ending the inequalities that are structural drivers of the HIV pandemic. The Reference Group stands ready to assist in the implementation of this strategy in the years ahead and looks forward to ongoing discussion and providing ongoing guidance to the UNAIDS Secretariat and the Joint Programme.

To this end, we take this opportunity to share some observations and recommendations during the realignment process underway, which we understand is aimed at ensuring UNAIDS is fit for the purposes of implementing the new strategy internally and of guiding Member States and the UN system as a whole in its implementation. We would like to kindly request that the following be taken into consideration:

- **Ensure that there is adequate capacity and technical expertise, within the UNAIDS Secretariat and across the Joint Programme, to address human rights issues related to HIV, including addressing substantive gender inequalities, and to work with and support communities, particularly of key populations. This requires both sufficient staffing and comprehensive training and support for staff at country and regional level.** Concern has been growing for years about the intensified attacks on civic space, with key populations and human rights defenders particularly targeted, which of course then further weakens the prospect of ending human rights abuses and gender and other inequalities – and hence impedes achievement of the goal of ending AIDS, as well as numerous other SDGs. UNAIDS has long played a key role on the global stage, advocating for human rights for groups left behind. It will be critical, as we continue to respond to the backlash on human rights, to

maintain that significant presence. Human rights concerns affect every region of the world, and the voice of the Joint Programme and the Secretariat will be needed in each of them. Over the last several years, the Reference Group has regularly identified an ongoing need to strengthen the capacity of UN staff at country level to address human rights and gender inequality, in collaboration with communities. This must be supported by dedicated human rights expertise at the regional level and be accompanied at the global level by policy work to set norms and develop guidance and by strong advocacy. Given the importance to an effective HIV response of addressing human rights and gender issues, and of supporting and working with communities, and that these three dimensions are recognized in the new global strategy, we hope that these will be reflected in the realignment.

- **Strengthen the work on access to medicines and other health technologies within a strong human rights and equalities framework.** Another fundamental human rights issue – one that shows some of the starkest inequalities in the HIV response, within countries and between countries – is the ongoing inequity in access to life-saving medicines and other health technologies. This, too, has been an area in which the Reference Group has repeatedly encouraged UNAIDS leadership to devote greater resources to help communities and countries scale up equitable access to affordable, quality medicines, a key element of the right to health and an absolute necessity if we are to end AIDS as a public health threat by 2030. The UNAIDS Secretariat and Joint Programme co-sponsors, including UNDP, have done important technical and norm-setting work in this area, but that capacity has been inadequate in the face of ongoing challenges, including in relation to matters of intellectual property policy, competition policy, price regulation, etc., and the advancement of rules in international, bilateral and regional treaties that impede transparency in the pharmaceutical industry and constrain countries' policy space for taking measures to improve access to medicines for all. The UN Secretary General's High-Level Panel on Access to Medicines has also set out important programmatic priorities for addressing this ongoing global challenge. Ending the inequality in access to health technologies is central to the work of ending AIDS; we hope that the realignment will strengthen the ability of the UNAIDS Secretariat and the Joint Programme as a whole to engage fully in this critical work.
- **Ensure that UNAIDS and co-sponsors have the capacity to follow through on the promise of the [Global Partnership for Action to Eliminate All Forms of HIV-related Stigma and Discrimination](#),** given the focus on ending inequalities in the new global strategy. Stigma and discrimination, at multiple levels and in multiple settings, are key drivers of the pandemic, including by undermining access to effective, evidence-based, rights-respecting measures for prevention, care, treatment and support of HIV and other related health services. The Global Partnership, a response to community demands, is a welcome initiative. However, there is some concern that, without significant support and input by the co-conveners, it will fail to generate significant impact, including at country level. Such a partnership – ideally expanded to include a greater number of countries and generating more concrete actions by all partners – offers an important opportunity to advance the

UNAIDS Reference Group on HIV and Human Rights

goals of ending inequalities, thereby contributing to ending AIDS. To deliver on its promise, the partnership requires sustained support and leadership, including from UNAIDS; this should be reflected in the UNAIDS realignment. The Reference Group would also be pleased to provide input regarding the Global Partnership.

We note that the observations above are relevant to the realignment internally within the UNAIDS Secretariat, but also applicable to the Joint Programme as a whole. Within their areas of responsibility, co-sponsors must also have the capacity to contribute to the collective effort of sustained work in the above areas, which are fundamental to effective implementation of the new strategy.

We hope these reflections are useful to you in this process. As always, we would be pleased to meet at any time to discuss these ideas and others. We look forward to our next opportunity to meet.

Yours sincerely,

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The signature on the left is 'Eszter Kismödi' and the signature on the right is 'Allan Maleche'.

Eszter Kismödi and Allan Maleche
Co-chairs

cc: Mr. Achim Steiner, UNDP Administrator
Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director General, WHO

The UNAIDS Reference Group on HIV and Human Rights was established in 2002 to advise the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS on all matters relating to HIV and human rights. 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.