

AIDS 2012 Closing Ceremony

Civil society address of the Global Network of People living with HIV (GNP+) and the Caribbean Vulnerable Communities Coalition (CVCC)

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen! I am Anna Zakowicz, the Co-Chair of the Global Network of People Living with HIV.

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen! I am Ian McKnight, Executive Director of the Caribbean Vulnerable Communities Coalition.

At this conference we have been inspired by the energy of communities living with and affected by HIV and we have been energised by our engagement with researchers, scientists, lawyers and the community, we are here to present you with the top critical issues from communities living with and affected by HIV.

As we return to where we live and where we work, these are the issues we must tackle together!

WHERE ARE THE SEX WORKERS AND PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS? WE ARE TOGETHER IN THIS!

In 1983 in Denver in the United States, people living with HIV came together and created the Denver Principles. The key among them is that HIV cannot be solved without including people living with HIV. In 1994 at the Paris summit, this was translated into the GIPA principles and accepted by 42 governments but almost thirty years after Denver, people living with HIV still have to shout 'NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US'.

The exclusion of people who use drugs and sex workers in this conference has been an abomination. Organising hubs is a nice gesture but we needed their voices and issues here with us this week! These half baked attempts at including people who use drugs and sex workers are tokenistic at best.

We must not miss anyone at the next conference. We must ensure that no single community and no single region is excluded from the dialogue. In that regard we need to critically review future conferences, the host cities and the frequency of the IAC in an effort to ensure maximum participation of community members.

We will not end the epidemic without the full engagement of people living with HIV, women, young people, gay men and other men who have sex with men, trans communities, people who use drugs, sex workers, prisoners, refugees and people with disabilities, and others. **We, we are THE most critical part of the solution!**

EXCITING SCIENCE – HOW DO WE GET IT TO WORK FOR PEOPLE?

At this conference, people living with HIV and those of us from vulnerable communities are encouraged by the science and research on treatment as prevention, the cure, microbicides and vaccines. For us, *treatment is first and foremost* for the health of people living with HIV. We need health for every individual living with HIV. This is an essential part of combination prevention.

However, we are concerned with the relative lack of attention to the behavioural and social determinants. A solely biomedical approach to the HIV response will not be enough to prevent new infections and ensure access to treatment, care and support services for those who need them.

As we move towards Melbourne, we need to link both medical and social approaches and we need to ensure that people living with HIV and key populations are central to the response.

We are going to do it, but we have to do it properly.

TREATMENT FOR ALL NOW

Our over-arching priority must be treatment to improve the health and well-being of people living with HIV. This means we must achieve universal access to treatment for people who require it for their own health. This is no time to retreat from the commitment to scale up universal access!

A question to the pharmaceutical companies: Where are you?! WHERE ARE YOU?! Why are you not in the Medicines Patent Pool?! Why are you restricting the production of generic medications?! Why are you wining and dining doctors at this conference while people are dying of AIDS in the streets of Harare, Soweto and Islamabad!

A question to the United States of America – why are you on one hand providing treatment through PEPFAR, while on the other you are denying treatment by supporting free trade agreements which block access to low cost generics.

We are not statistics; we are your sisters and brothers, mothers and fathers, we are teachers and nurses, colleagues and tax payers. We need action, not words, and we need universal access now!!

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS – THIS MUST BE A REALITY!

Human rights violations against people living with HIV and against key populations are still rampant all over the world and this has to stop! We are not going to achieve the three Zeros without ensuring human rights.

In Jamaica alone, since the last conference, we have lost Albert, Trevor, Lloyd and Paul and many more. These men and women in other places were killed because of their sexual orientation. Some of these people were killed because they were living with HIV.

This kind of gender based violence is unacceptable and governments and police forces have to go full out and stop these senseless killings!

As we scale up treatment and prevention and explore and deliver them in innovative modes, we must fight stigma in the workplace, in the clinics, in schools, in places of worship and in communities.

We must also repeal these punitive laws, laws that criminalise people living with HIV, gay men, transgender people, people who use drugs and sex workers. These laws are wasteful, violate human rights and undermine public health. This means not singling out HIV or people living with HIV under the criminal laws.

We do not need a legal framework to reach sex workers in dangerous places. We need laws that get commercial sex out of dangerous places and into safe ones.

Allowing repressive laws in any criminal justice system is not the way to solve these issues! These kinds of criminal law is informed by stigma, not by science.

We, women and girls in all our diversities, including trans women, and women in prisons have already given so much to this pandemic in terms of care, love, support and even our lives, but we have been consistently excluded and marginalised from making the decisions that determine our lives.

We, women must have autonomy over our bodies: we must have the right to decide whether and when to have children or not; we must have the right to decide who to have sex with or not. We must decide our own destinies.

WE CANNOT MAKE IT HAPPEN WITHOUT MONEY

All the calls we are hearing this week to ‘turn the tide’, ‘end the epidemic’ and get to ‘zero new infections, and zero AIDS-related deaths’ are doomed to fail if we do not have the funding we need to do this work well.

NONE of this can EVER happen without serious financial commitments. We renew our call for all our governments to take ownership for the response and to make the investment necessary to end AIDS. African Governments must meet their Abuja commitments.

There is absolutely no option for the Global Fund to cap its funding. The Global Fund has the obligation to go out and look for more money to fund more treatment. Governments of high income countries in turn have the obligation to support the global fund. This is more than a moral obligation.

The only reason for the Global Fund to exist is to save lives. If the Global Fund fails to do so, it fails the people.

We must work together for health, for dignity and for prevention!

We must translate the optimism of this conference into a reality on the ground: No more words, we need actions now!