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Greece must stop the criminalization and stigmatization of alleged sex workers found to be HIV positive

Amnesty International is seriously concerned by the decision of Greek authorities involving the arrest, forced HIV testing, and pressing of criminal charges against 31 alleged sex workers.

These women have been charged by the Greek authorities with intentionally causing serious bodily harm under the Greek Criminal Code and also for breaches of the national legislation on sex workers (Law 2734/1999). Amnesty International is also concerned by the prosecutor's order to publish the personal details and photographs of 29 of these alleged sex workers in the website of the Greek police.

These women were arrested following joint operations by the police and the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention over the last eighteen days seeking to identify sex workers working in illegal brothels and open spaces in downtown Athens. Upon arrest women were reportedly forced to undergo HIV test at the police station without consent and any information or counselling regarding the nature of test.

Amnesty International believes that the measures adopted by the Greek authorities are completely misguided and ineffective in terms of the stated policy goals, and that they will result in the further stigmatization of individuals who engage in sex work and of persons living with HIV. Punitive approaches to regulating sex work have proven ineffective in reducing HIV transmission among people who provide sexual services and their clients.

Further, publication of names, photographs and positive HIV status is a fundamental breach of confidentiality and exposes sex workers to stigma and violence. Such measures are likely to result in further discrimination and could lead to reduced access to the health services they need.

Amnesty International calls the Greek authorities to take appropriate measures and provide those individuals found HIV positive with counselling and information and to encourage the voluntary counselling and testing of those who are unaware of their HIV status. Amnesty International further calls on the Greek authorities to stop the criminalization and stigmatization of sex workers including, in particular, those found to be HIV positive.

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