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UNGASS Review Meeting: Effective action on HIV/AIDS requires more than lip service to human rights

Amnesty International calls on states to renew their commitment to address HIV/AIDS using a rights-based framework. As governments reconvene at the UN General Assembly between 31 May and 2 June 2006 to assess their progress in the implementation of the targets and commitments made in 2001, Amnesty International calls on governments to ensure that the design and implementation of policy responses to HIV/AIDS are informed by a meaningful understanding of the links between the denial of human rights and the spread and impact of the epidemic. The UN International Guidelines on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights provide concrete guidance to states on how to implement effective rights-based responses.

Human rights violations fuel the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the pandemic gives rise to human rights violations.

This was affirmed by the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) which met in New York in 2001. The concluding Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS said: "The full realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all is an essential element in a global response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, including in the areas of prevention, care, support and treatment, and that it reduces the vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and prevents stigma and related discrimination against people living with or at risk of HIV/AIDS."

Twenty-five years into the epidemic, 14,000 new infections and 8,000 deaths occur every day. States are failing to meet targets set for prevention, treatment and care including the Millennium Development Goal 6 – to halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Amnesty International's research, and that of numerous other organizations, has highlighted the fundamental link between HIV/AIDS and human rights. Violations of human rights increase people's risk of HIV infection. Often those whose human rights are abused -- the poor, the most marginalized and women -- face an increased vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. Furthermore, people affected by and living with HIV/AIDS often face further violations of their human rights, including discrimination within society, at work, and in accessing treatment, care and support services.

Amnesty International is concerned that the current draft of the Political Declaration to be adopted by UN member states at the conclusion of the Review Meeting contains weak human rights provisions. Amnesty International urges governments to ensure that the Political Declaration adopted at the meeting includes strong and clear commitments for the effective protection and promotion of human rights for all in the fight against HIV/AIDS. These include commitments to fulfilling the right to health, to ensuring equal access to treatment and information, guaranteeing the confidentiality of those living with HIV/AIDS and protecting human rights as part of comprehensive national responses to HIV/AIDS. It requires ending gender-based

violence and all forms of discrimination against women. It also must include the participation of those most affected, including people living with HIV/AIDS, women and marginalized groups, in all HIV/AIDS-related programme, policy and budget decision-making.

The International Guidelines on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights are available at:

http://data.unaids.org/publications/irc-pub02/jc520-humanrights_en.pdf

Amnesty International's statement on Action on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights (ACT 75/002/2006) is available at: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGA750022006>