

Dear Ms. Bachelet,

We are a coalition of women's organizations advocating for women's rights and health in global and national responses to HIV and AIDS. We are delighted to welcome you to your new role as Under-Secretary General of UN Women, and we would now like to ask for your support in ensuring that women are prioritized within the work of all UN agencies, and especially UNAIDS. Under your leadership, we are confident that UN Women can play an important role in ensuring this.

Particularly when it comes to HIV and women, we would appreciate your support in ensuring that the UNAIDS Agenda for Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV is prioritized within the 2012-2014 Unified Budget and Accountability Framework, through the development of indicators and allocation of the much needed resources.

As you are well aware, women now make up more than half of the people with HIV globally and more than 60% in sub-Saharan Africa. Women's vulnerabilities and position in many societies make us more susceptible to contracting HIV, and also mean that women are overwhelmingly affected by HIV and AIDS – as grandmothers, mothers, daughters and community caregivers.

Although this is a common fact, women still do not receive a fair share of the global funding or attention for AIDS. Over 70% of AIDS funding that goes to the Health Sector reaches men. Since women are not considered the main transmitters, Prevention strategies, policies, messaging and targeted research has largely omitted women and girls (except for vertical transmission to prevent infants from acquiring HIV). Prevention efforts are primarily devoted to biomedical approaches such as medical male circumcision, male condoms, distribution of clean needles, and now increasingly treatment as prevention.

While some of these biomedical approaches have far more potential positive outcome for women than others, from our diverse experiences, we know that biomedical approaches alone fall far short of the complex socio-ecological response needed to stem this pandemic. Placing women at the center of the HIV and AIDS response would lift all boats in communities. Investing in women's health and rights, including their assets and livelihoods, participation in democratic decision-making, access to health, sexual and reproductive health services and protection of their rights, and empowering women with education and information benefits entire families, communities and nations, and would ultimately turn the tide of HIV. We see funding and programming for AIDS as an opportunity to invest in women's empowerment and address our vulnerabilities. Too often, however, those of us with HIV are only able to access health care when we are pregnant, given treatment so that our children do not get HIV, and then left without life saving drugs or vital services. Further, HIV prevention services do not reach women through the provision of contraception, maternity care, STI prevention and treatment, and programs that empower them to have an independent voice in their homes and communities, prevent violence, access the information and services they need, and participate in decision-making. This way of practice ignores the correlation between the health and empowerment of mothers and life outcomes of the child. It also negates the independent value of the health and quality of life of women.

Many of our organizations strove for the creation of UN Women, and we are gratified by your selection to lead the new agency. At the same time, we would welcome the opportunity to work with you to take strategic actions together to ensure that UNAIDS and other UN agencies continue to invest their own budgets and programming to support women's organizations and programs.

We would like to request a meeting with you to discuss how we can work together concretely, and we hope such a meeting can be a part of the actions you take in your first 100 days in office. Moreover, we would especially appreciate your leadership in sending out a very clear message to all heads of UN Agencies and Programmes, emphasizing that the United Nations' work on Women remains the responsibility of all members of the UN family together.

Thank you for your leadership, and we look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

EKHC, Medan Acts, Ethiopia

Fundación para Estudio e Investigación de la Mujer-FEIM, GEAR Focal Point, Latin America

Gestos

Girls Power Initiative, Nigeria

Huairou Commission

International Women's Health Coalition

International AIDS Women's Caucus-IAWC

ICW West and Central Africa regions

ICW North America

International Women's Communication Center, Nigeria

Jamaican Community of Positive Women

Ntankah Village Women Common Initiative Group, Cameroon

Salamander Trust

SHAFON, Ethiopia

UCOBAC, Uganda

World AIDS Campaign

Zimbabwe Women Writers-Women Voices