



February 23, 2009

Mr. Michel Sidibé
Executive Director
UNAIDS
Geneva

Dear Michel,

As members of the Working Group of “With Women Worldwide—A Compact to End HIV/AIDS”, we would like to offer our congratulations on your appointment as the Executive Director of UNAIDS. The Compact (<http://www.withwomenworldwide.org>) is an action agenda, signed by over 300 organizations from seven constituencies and 50 countries, to bring about the policy changes needed to prevent new infections in women and young people, and to ensure their equitable access to treatment, care, and support.

The Compact recognizes that widespread failure to protect girls’ and women’s human rights—including their right to health and their right to live free of sexual coercion and violence—fuels the pandemic. Universal access to sexual and reproductive health services and sexuality education, and protection of sexual and reproductive rights, are thus essential to end the spread of HIV. We hope that UNAIDS will prioritize these actions in response to the disproportionate number of new infections in girls and women.

We respectfully submit several priority recommendations to assist UNAIDS in achieving the universal access goals outlined in your February 10 *Letter to Partners*. Many of us have worked for years with UNAIDS and the PCB to gain effective support for girls and women to little avail. The following actions would make a major difference.

- 1. Promote rights-based approaches to prevention for women and girls:** convene an expert group to outline concrete actions that UNAIDS can take to assist countries in protecting the human rights of women and preventing all forms of violence against girls and women.
- 2. Promote and support women’s and young people’s access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services:** these are a primary avenue to disseminate HIV prevention information and provide voluntary, counseling and testing (VCT) in the context of overall services for sexual and reproductive health. They can offer treatment and referrals for people living with HIV/AIDS as well as services and support for girls and women who have been subjected to violence. As a priority, prevention of mother-to-

child transmission (PMTCT) programs must include all the four pillars¹ of PMTCT protect their reproductive rights. The most effective and efficient way to achieve all of these goals is to invest in and ensure that all women and young people have access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services as agreed in the ICPD.

3. **Endorse and assist countries to provide universal access to comprehensive sexuality education:** that provides full and accurate information on sexuality, protection from sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancy; promotes gender equality and human rights; builds skills for mutual consent in sex and marriage; and provides the basis for ending sexual coercion and violence against women and girls. In at least six countries such education is reaching national scale and thus we know these types of programs are possible and effective.
4. **Promote multisectoral efforts to address women's empowerment and gender equality:** UNAIDS should urge and assist all co-sponsors, and sectoral ministries to set and budget for gender equality objectives and help hold them accountable for achieving these objectives within agreed time frames.
5. **Prioritize access to female condoms:** work with governments, the private sector, other agencies and donors to introduce female condoms (along with male condoms) and provide a sustainable supply.
6. **Ensure gender expertise in UNAIDS:** strengthen UNAIDS capacity (in headquarters and country offices) to assess sex and age differentials in epidemics, design programs to support girls and women, and monitor and evaluate them. Complement this capacity by investing in and partnering with women's organizations, including women living with HIV, at all levels. Ensure that priorities and actions concerning girls and women agreed by the PCB are supported within the Secretariat and from the Secretariat to the national level.
7. **Monitor new and emerging initiatives from the perspective of the human rights of women and girls:** for example, assess new prevention methods such as adult male circumcision to determine the implications for and ensure protection of women's and girls' human rights. UNAIDS should continue its proactive role in engaging with governments to stop the increasing threat of criminalization of HIV transmission, a trend that has special negative implications for women.

Again, we congratulate you on your appointment and we hope that you will use the Compact Working Group and its members as a strong partner and resource. We look forward to working with you as you direct resources to where progress is lagging, one of greatest being programs and policies for women and girls.

¹ The four pillars are: prevention of HIV in women; prevention of unintended pregnancies among HIV positive women; prevention of transmission from a woman with HIV to her infant; and care and support for HIV positive women, their infants and their families.

Sincerely yours,

Compact Working Group Members:

Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE), United States

Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL), United States

Fundación para Estudio e Investigación de la Mujer/ Foundation for the Studies and Research on Women (FEIM), Argentina

GESTOS Soropositividade, Comunicação e Gênero/ GESTOS Seropositivity, Communication & Gender, Brazil

Global Youth Coalition on HIV/AIDS (GYCA), Global

International Community of Women Living With HIV/AIDS (ICW), Global

International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC), United States

Sampada Grameen Mahila Sanstha (SANGRAM), India

World Young Women's Christian Association (World YWCA), Global

Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights, Global

Zambian National AIDS Network (ZNAN), Zambia

cc Dr. Sigrum Mogedal, AIDS Ambassador of Norway.