



World YWCA

WORLD YOUNG WOMEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION
ALLIANCE MONDIALE DES UNIONS CHRETIENNES FEMININES
ASOCIACION CRISTIANA FEMENINA MUNDIAL

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Vienna 2010 Conference Coordinating Committee
C/O International AIDS Society
Chemin de l'Avanchet, 33
1216 Geneva
Switzerland

May 9, 2009

Dear members of the CCC,

Re: Reconsidering the IAS definition of youth

Congratulations on the progress made by the Conference Coordinating Committee towards the upcoming International AIDS Conference (IAC) – we look forward to another successful conference.

We have noted the steady increase in youth attendees at the IAC over the years: from only 200 participants under 30 years of age in Barcelona, to 450 in Bangkok; 1000 in Toronto and nearly 1500 in Mexico. Whilst we have seen more young participants, especially young women, at the conference, the current age limitation still inhibits young people from being able to contribute to the conference and possibly access the scholarship process. We remain concerned in this regard to the current 18 - 24 years definition of youth used by the IAS. We believe that it excludes young people whose participation is essential and non-negotiable to achieve the objectives of the conference.

We believe that the current age definition excludes youth leaders whose contribution would consistently enrich the IAC debates and discussions. This is particularly true for activists from Sub-Saharan countries, and given that this region is home to over 60% of all people living with HIV. In addition, we know that in parts of this region, young women are up to six times more likely to be infected with HIV than young men of the same age. We urge the CCC to encourage participation of young men and women and consider the limitations of the current definition.

By the age of 24, many young people have not undertaken or completed major research or program work on HIV and AIDS-related issues that they can share; extending the age limit to 26 would allow for additional young people to engage in the conference in a more substantive way. In addition, we ask you to develop criteria for meaningful and gender sensitive youth participation in the IAC and that those criteria are incorporated in the call for and acceptance of abstracts and skill-building sessions.

Another challenging factor is that young people under the age of 18 were not able to apply for a scholarship in Mexico. This prevents young people, including young HIV-positive people, from accessing scholarships, as was the case in Mexico. All of these issues need to be addressed as we move towards Vienna AIDS 2010.

By excluding the under-18 age group, the conference is deprived of adolescents' perspective, which is crucial given this age group's vulnerability to HIV infection and their specific prevention, treatment and care needs. It also hinders the legitimate right to participate in a key HIV-related dialogue platform and in decision-making processes that affect the lives of young people, as outlined in the Convention on the Right of the Child.

We recommend the following:

1. The age limit is expanded from 18 - 24 to 16 - 26. Young people 16 - 26 years old are usually more knowledgeable and experienced and thus able to contribute more meaningfully to the IAC debates, while serving as mentors to younger groups and being a position to strengthen the AIDS response. Taking into account these concerns, we request the CCC reconsiders the age definition for youth and broaden its range to 16 - 26 for registration, volunteering and scholarships.
2. Ensure that people 16 years old and above are able to apply for a scholarship.

We look forward to working with you as we move forward to Vienna and hearing your response on this important issue.

Kind regards



Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda
General Secretary, World YWCA,

List of co-signatory organisations to this letter:

- » Athena Network - Tyler Crone, Coordinating Director
- » Caribbean Drug and Alcohol Research Institute - Marcus Day, Director
- » East Europe and Central Asia Union PLHIV - Terry White, International Relations
- » Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance - Thabo Sephuma, HIV and AIDS Campaigns Officer
- » Global Network of PLHIV - Mauro Guarinieri, Senior consultant for GNP+
- » Global Youth Coalition on HIV/ AIDS (GYCA) - Joya Banerjee, Member
- » ICASO - Kieren Daly, Executive Director
- » International AIDS Women's Caucus - Mabel Bianco, Coordinator
- » International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS - Beri Hull, Global Advocacy Officer
- » International Women's Health Coalition - Adrienne Germaine, President
- » International Planned Parenthood Federation, Western Hemisphere Region - Alexandra Garita, International Advocacy Coordinator
- » Rozaria Memorial Trust - Kudakwashe Dizha, Coordinator
- » Women Won't Wait Campaign - Neelanjana Mukhia, Coordinator, International Secretariat
- » Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights - Imane Khachani, MD, Chair of the HIV Taskforce