

20 February 2008

Peter Piot
Executive Director
UNAIDS
20, Avenue Appia
CH-1211 Geneva 27
Switzerland

Dear Peter,

We write to express serious concern about the current draft of the gender guidelines prepared for the UNAIDS PCB in April. When the PCB made the decision to work on these guidelines in June 2006, we were encouraged by their potential to be a meaningful tool that will lead to concrete actions that eventually will have an important effect in women's lives.

Given that the PCB decision expressively called for these guidelines in response to the growing number of women infected and affected by the epidemic, we are quite distressed to find that the last draft of the guidance that was circulated for comments, inequality and inequity between women and men was being conflated with discrimination against same sex practicing partners and sexual minorities. Merging the guidelines for these two populations weakens the guidance for each and does disservice to both. In addition, it ignores the core intent of the decision taken at the PCB, which was to develop a tool to help countries alleviate the devastating impact of policies that are blind to the needs of women and girls.

CEDAW, Beijing, ICPD and other intergovernmental agreements define gender equality and women's empowerment. These agreements have been carefully negotiated and agreed upon and reflect over four decades of tireless work by women's organizations. We ask that UNAIDS respect this work both for strategic and substantive reasons. We strongly support and urge UNAIDS to develop specific guidance on same sex practicing partners and sexual minorities. A proposal for such work should be put to the PCB and we would not only support it but advocate for it.

We strongly urge that the guidance on reducing girls' and women's vulnerability and ensuring their equitable access to prevention, treatment, care and support be finalized with input from those with recognized expertise on gender equality before it is presented to the PCB.

We look forward to your response at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Bafana Khumalo, Sonke Gender Justice
Gcebile Ndlovu, International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS (ICW)
Mabel Bianco, FEIM
Serra Sippel, Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE)
Sisonke Msimang, Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA)
Sophie Dilmitis, World YWCA
Adrienne Germain, International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC)
Zonibel Woods, International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC)

