

Dear Representatives of APCOM,

I thank you for sharing the joint statements and recommendations on the new Global AIDS Strategy pertinent to the HIV response in the Asia and the Pacific region, which resonate across all regions. Key populations, including gay men and other men who have sex with men, continue to be left behind across the continuum of treatment, prevention and elimination of discrimination.

I would also like to thank you for your active participation in the strategy development process including the surveys, interviews, focus group discussions, workshops and ongoing consultations.

Your statements reaffirm *The UNAIDS evidence review report* findings and recommendations, and together they serve to inform the next strategy. I want to reassure you that your contributions matter, they are heard, and we will continue working with communities to ensure the final Strategy meets the needs of communities left behind.

The Strategy development process, including through your participation has reaffirmed the need to address the disparities in the global AIDS response, which are increasingly defined by inequalities between regions, between countries within regions and between populations and communities. The next Global AIDS Strategy must be a strategy that focuses on eliminating inequities and inequalities.

I appreciate your strong push for the Strategy to be human rights and evidence based, localized, and tailored to the needs of the key populations within the context they live. And I would like to reassure you of my strong and personal commitment to stand by you, as a human rights activist, feminist, and the head of UNAIDS to ensure that the Global AIDS Strategy reflects the needs and concerns of key populations, particularly gay men and other men who have sex with men, sex workers, people who use drugs, transgender people and other populations who are vulnerable and marginalised for who they are, as expressed in your statement.

I thank you for bringing attention to the situation with the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 has had severe health and social consequences for people living with or at risk of HIV and TB, disrupting essential health and HIV services, as well as the supply of essential HIV commodities. Current responses to COVID-19, have amplified the marginalization of communities most at risk to HIV, leaving them behind from social protection relief programmes, and suffering greater economic and livelihoods hardships.

I am also in full agreement with you that engagement of community-led organizations remains inadequate. If we aim to achieve the new ambitious 2025 targets we must elevate the critical role of communities and community-led HIV responses – participation in accountability, advocacy, service delivery, community-led research.

In this regard, I am pleased to inform you that the next strategy includes new result areas and recommendations specifically devoted to addressing the raised concerns and ensure that:

- Community-led responses are fully recognized, empowered, resourced and integrated for a transformative and sustainable HIV response
- People living with, at risk of, or affected by HIV have access to social protection benefits and support
- HIV response is fully prepared and resilient to protect people living with, at risk and affected by HIV from adverse impacts of current and future pandemics and shocks

I will continue to advocate for community-led rights based approaches to health and the removal of discriminatory laws. Together we must address the structural barriers that have persisted in the HIV response like decriminalization, stigma and discrimination, punitive laws and gender inequality. The right to health is for everyone.

I welcome your continued participation and engagement in the development of the global AIDS strategy. This is the time for us to think through the current global health, economic and social challenges that we need to overcome to reach vulnerable and underserved communities.

The UNAIDS strategy development team will take forward the statements as a reference document in the continuing strategy consultations, and I have also asked our Director of the Regional Support Team for the Asia and the Pacific region, Eamonn Murphy, to further follow up you on country specific aspects.

I look forward to our continued dialogue on these issues.

In solidarity,

Winnie

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