

CHAMPIONS FOR AN AIDS-FREE GENERATION IN AFRICA



Kaleidoscope Trust

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PRESS RELEASE: African champions urge world to 'Leave No One Behind' in the fight to eradicate AIDS

The Champions for an AIDS Free Generation have declared that to eradicate AIDS as a public health threat, the world must 'Leave No One behind'. The declaration was made at a meeting of Pretoria-based Commonwealth diplomats and civil society experts in Pretoria, South Africa to discuss challenges around the rights and access to services of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex people as well as sex workers, adolescent girls and young women.

His Excellency Festus Mogae, Chairperson of the Champions and former President of Botswana, informed the meeting that to end AIDS as a public health threat by 2030, no one should be left behind and that "We can only do so by engaging everyone". He acknowledged the cultural sensitivities of the discussions but told the meeting that, "We cannot afford taboos in this day and age". Fellow Champion, His Excellency Joaquim Chissano urged governments to decriminalise consensual same-sex activity between adults and stressed that this was crucial to stopping the spread of HIV. Meanwhile, His Excellency Benjamin Mkapa, the former Tanzanian President, called for a greater focus on removing barriers to accessing education on sexual and reproductive issues for young people, especially adolescent girls between the ages 10 to 19 years old.

Executive Director of UNAIDS, Michel Sidibé, also attended and supported the call. "Protection of LGBTI persons and ensuring their access to HIV and health services must remain at the heart of our intervention and advocacy. We therefore need to intensify our efforts in addressing stigma and discrimination in health care settings through sensitization of health care personnel." He also added, "We need a new paradigm shift in addressing gender inequalities, gender based violence and inequalities in access to health services which are fueling the HIV epidemic among adolescent girls and young women."

The meeting also heard from Mr Danilo Da Silva, Executive Director of Mozambican organisation Lambda who spoke about the recent progress of Mozambique in reforming its penal code to decriminalise same-sex relations and modernise colonial-era legislation. Discussing the event, Mr Da Silva said, “this begins the debate and the Champions’ leadership will hopefully lead to a more open conversation about inclusion of the most at risk populations such as LGBT people and their access to health services in the African region.”

Justice Oagile Dingake of the High Court of Botswana, Co-Chair of the African Think-Tank on HIV, Health and Social Justice, also praised the dialogue, saying “As sensitive as the subject might be, it is time that we have, in the African continent, a frank and inclusive dialogue regarding LGBTI persons and their rights in accessing health services without discrimination. The fundamental principles of equality and non-discrimination must apply to every citizen”.

Steve Letsike, Executive Director of South African organisation Access Chapter 2 stressed the importance of creating safe spaces for dialogue. She stated that “Taboos create silence and silences create injustice. This leads to gender-based violence and violence to other groups”.

Notes to editors

This dialogue was convened by the Champions for an AIDS Free Generation in Africa, Access Chapter 2, The Royal Commonwealth Society, the Kaleidoscope Trust and the African Think Tank on HIV, Health and Social Justice.

The debate was held on 30th March 2017 in Pretoria, South Africa.

In addition to Champions HE Festus Mogae, HE Joaquim Chissano and HE Benjamin Mkapa, attendees were drawn from Pretoria-based diplomats representing Commonwealth nations, civil society representatives and other experts.

Same-sex relations are still criminalised in 36 of 52 Commonwealth countries, largely as a legacy of laws imposed by the British Empire.

The Champions for an AIDS Free Generation, established in 2008, is a group of former heads of states and eminent persons from Africa. The Champions’ 2017 to 2018 Strategic orientation focuses their advocacy on “Taking on complex issues to expand access to HIV services and leaving no one behind”. The orientation is premised on shifting focus from general HIV and AIDS advocacy to a directed effort on removing barriers to access and leaving no one behind. <http://www.aidsfreechampions.org/>

The Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS), founded in 1868, is a network of individuals and organisations committed to improving the lives and prospects of Commonwealth citizens around the world. Through youth empowerment, education and advocacy, the RCS promotes the value and values of the Commonwealth. www.thercs.org

Access Chapter 2 of Pretoria, was initiated to promote the human rights and empowerment of women and LGBTI people, and the participation of civil society organisation in governance and

policy processes by creating space and coordinating platforms for engagement on governance, policy and accountability. <http://www.ac2.org.za/index.html>

The Kaleidoscope Trust was established in 2011. The Trust works to uphold the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) people in countries where they do not have their equal rights and are discriminated against because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. www.kaleidoscopetrust.com/

The African Think-Tank on HIV, Health and Social Justice seeks to apply a human rights and social justice lens to the distinct African contextual realities of the ongoing HIV pandemic, with particular attention to people living with HIV and other key populations, including LGBTI persons.

Press Enquiries

Makha Mohale, Executive Secretary of the Champions for an AIDS Free Generation in Africa
mohalem@unaid.org