



Fast Track Cities: Ending the AIDS Epidemic

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This high-level event was convened by Mayor of Paris, the Mayor of New York City and UNAIDS and featured Mayors from more than 30 cities who had signed onto the “Paris Declaration” committing to achieving 90-90-90 Targets by 2020: 90% of people living with HIV knowing their HIV status; 90% of people who know their HIV-positive status on treatment; and 90% of people on treatment with suppressed viral loads. It was intended to demonstrate the commitments of city leaders and help to shape the global vision and actions for ending AIDS while building momentum for the United Nations High-level Meeting on Ending AIDS.

Thank you to UNAIDS, city leaders, and funding partners for convening this important meeting. I would like to respond to your question about how cities can partner with NGO’s by focusing on key populations. While broad scale interventions and advancements in testing and biomedical solutions are fundamental, without a focus on key populations, we will not end AIDS.

Key populations are people who are more affected by HIV everywhere around the world. Key populations include sex workers, transgender people, men who have sex with men, people who inject drugs and prisoners.

Criminalization is a barrier for these populations. The experiences of sex workers, people who use drugs, and people whose sexual behavior or gender identity is criminalized show that criminalization exacerbates the risk of HIV exposure, the risks of knowing one’s status, and reduces the ability to access treatment. Governments that continue to stigmatize and criminalize these populations will not reach the 90-90-90 targets to end the epidemic.

As a Director of the Sex Workers Project here in New York City, I have seen that criminalization of sex work is a failed policy. It does not provide living wage alternatives to those who sell sex, but only adds harm to their lives: from the trauma of arrest and incarceration, to having a criminal record making it harder to get a job, to increased risk of trafficking and exploitation, to prevention of effective health outreach. In many cities worldwide, possession of condoms can be used as evidence of intent to engage in sex

work. Law enforcement officers routinely confiscate condoms from suspected sex workers, sometimes arresting people based solely on their possession of condoms.

Criminalization is also linked to violence, because perpetrators know they are likely to go unpunished when they target criminalized people, and may even see themselves as vigilantes or enforcers of morality. Violence is both a cause and a consequence of HIV - sexual violence can transmit HIV, and people living with HIV can be targets of violence.

In 2012, the Global Commission on HIV and the Law recommended eliminating laws that criminalize HIV transmission and laws that criminalize sex work and drug use, as the most effective actions government can undertake to reach targets on HIV prevention. These recommendations have been echoed across UN Agencies and by global public health research in the Lancet in 2014.

As many of these harmful laws and policies are on the state or national level, what can cities do? Mayors and city governments have enormous potential to change the way sex workers and other key populations are centralized in the response to HIV. Cities can:

- Fund specific outreach and peer-led empowerment for key populations
- Fund research to evaluate the HIV burden on key populations and the local effects of criminalization on HIV
- Hold law enforcement accountable and vest law enforcement with a mission to serve public health and as well as public safety
- Facilitate problem-solving meetings in communities to address stigma and find alternative solutions other than criminalization
- Direct their police forces to make law enforcement related to sex work and other stigmatized behaviors the lowest enforcement priority, and effectuate the priority through reporting, grievance and oversight procedure
- Order their police forces not to use condoms as evidence of prostitution
- Adopt resolutions that State or National legislatures should decriminalize consensual sexual activity, drug use and HIV exposure

Thank you for your time.