



Equal Rights

## INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF WOMEN Alliance Internationale des Femmes

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[www.womenalliance.org](http://www.womenalliance.org)

**The Fight against Aids**

Talking Point no 2

### **A chance to fix the fight against Aids**

To improve prevention, HIV/Aids organisations must roll back George Bush's demonising of sex workers and drug users.

With President Bush's term coming to a close and a search underway for a new chief for the UNAids secretariat, the 15,000 experts and activists gathered in Mexico City for the 17th International Aids Conference can begin to repair the deadly damage inflicted by the Bush administration's reactionary take on HIV prevention and the UN's culpable failure to challenge it.

#### **The Bush administration**

Since 2001, the Bush administration has poured billions of US government dollars into preaching abstinence to young people, maligning the efficacy of condoms, denying key HIV prevention services to drug users and eradicating sex work - the last, bizarrely, elevated to an explicit goal of US foreign policy. The net result today is that HIV prevention is in tatters in many countries, including in the US itself.

In 2007, 2.5m people contracted HIV, bringing the global total of people living with HIV to over 33m. HIV prevention services reach less than one in 10 injection drug users and men who have sex with men, globally, and less than one in five sex workers - even though these disenfranchised populations have some of the highest HIV infection rates and are crucial to stemming the epidemic's spread. The demonising of sex workers and drug users has intensified, with raids, imprisonment and punitive laws on the upsurge in country after country, rich and poor alike.

#### **UNAids**

*(UNAids is a joint-agency effort that has coordinated the UN's response to Aids since 1996. Its 10 co-sponsors include the World Health Organisation and the World Bank).*

To its great credit, in its early years of operation, UNAids successfully integrated human rights and public health imperatives, as well as on-the-ground evidence of what works best, in framing policies and guidance on HIV prevention.

It developed a remarkable body of guidelines for legislators and other policy-makers about protecting the rights of the disenfranchised populations that are very vulnerable to HIV. It put together a wealth of evidence showing the value of Aids programmes and policies that put the last first - that engaged with and respected some of society's most marginalised persons as agents of change and HIV prevention.



It pronounced as "best practice" those path-breaking programmes that recognised the power of sex workers to educate their clients and the public, and the effectiveness of drug users as counsellors and outreach workers in HIV prevention efforts.

*Tragically, in the face of the Bush administration's assault, UNAids has disavowed much of this admirable legacy. The disavowal is particularly marked on sex work and injection drug use, the two areas singled out by the Bush administration.*

*Picture: IAW Convenor on Health, Gudrun Haupter, arriving in Delhi, IAW Convention 2007.*

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#### **Commission on Aids in Asia**

It may bode well for a new era of more courageous UN leadership against Aids that the Commission on Aids in Asia, a group of distinguished experts convened by but independent of UNAids, released a report in March that breaks with both the Bush and the current UNAids lines.

The HIV epidemic in Asia, the commission noted, affects mostly sex workers and their clients, drug users and men who have sex with men.

More on:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/aug/03/aids.unitednations/print> and on :

<http://www.unaids.org/en/Conferences/AIDS2008/default.asp>

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## Female condoms for Indian sex workers

NEW DELHI: About 1.5 million female condoms will be social-marketed to sex workers in four states this year as India, with over 2.5 million HIV/AIDS patients, tries to empower women in its fight against the disease. The National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) will focus on Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh with this programme.

The female condom is the only woman-controlled device currently available to prevent HIV transmission in India. It provides protection against unintended pregnancy as well as sexually transmitted diseases.

Women in sex work form a core population for the HIV prevention programme in India. Unprotected sex accounts for over 86 percent of HIV infections in the country. More on:

[http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/15\\_mn\\_female\\_condoms\\_for\\_Indian\\_sex\\_workers/articleshow/3462451.cms](http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/15_mn_female_condoms_for_Indian_sex_workers/articleshow/3462451.cms)

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## Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro calls for practical ideas in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Africa

*September 2008.* Asha-Rose Migiro urged HIV/AIDS experts to focus their efforts on studies leading to practical conclusions that directly contribute to the fight against the lethal disease in Africa, at a United Nations-sponsored academic seminar.

Ms. Migiro noted that the pandemic is eroding the gains in economic development across the continent, where some 1.6 million died from Aids.

In her [speech](#) she encouraged academics attending the meeting to draw conclusions from their research that would be useful for organisations such as the UN and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in Africa to strengthen their work on the ground and help local governments to plan.

Noting that HIV/AIDS has a different impact between and within countries across Africa, she said that greater efforts should be made to gather

information on the exact nature of the disease in a particular area.

*“Use local universities and local research centres to systematically document information. They are based in Africa, are working in Africa and living in affected communities. This will improve the quality of information available.”*



## Botswana

Using the example of the relative economic success of Botswana, Ms. Migiro said there are many questions that remain unanswered to effectively combat the disease. “Botswana’s annual GDP growth averaged around 13 per cent from independence in 1966 to 1989.

Yet... from 1990 onwards, average annual GDP growth dropped by more than half to 6 per cent [due to the effects of HIV/AIDS on the population],” she said.

“Life expectancy at birth also fell sharply from 65 years in the 1990 to 1995 period, to less than 40 years between 2000 to 2005,” she added.

She asked researchers to discover how individuals and households respond to an environment where life expectancy drops so dramatically, and whether people are willing to invest in the future or if they feel they have no future.

## Stigma makes Aids a silent killer

“Stigma helps make AIDS a silent killer because people fear the social disgrace of speaking openly about the disease, or taking easily available precautions,” she said.

## UN - General Assembly

The HIV/AIDS meeting is the third symposium in the UNU-Cornell “Africa Series”, which will be held during the General Assembly, starting later this month. The whole article is to be found on:

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=27987&Cr=HIV&Cr1=Africa>

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