

Dakar, April 10, 2008

To the International AIDS Society:

Senegal was the site of homophobic events this year after a private ceremony involving men who have sex with men was described in a magazine article published without the approval of those concerned. These regrettable events were denounced by Senegalese human rights organizations and actors in the response to AIDS.

Senegal acted very early to implement pragmatic policy in the fight against AIDS. In particular, specific programs for “vulnerable populations,” such as commercial sex workers and women and men who have sex with men, are an integral part of the national response to the AIDS epidemic in Senegal. The 2007-2011 strategic plan aims to further strengthen these programs.

As such, the national authorities reacted to these recent events with a firm restriction on homophobic demonstrations and an assurance of respect for the rights of the accused. All of the accused persons were ultimately released.

In addition, the civil society established a mediating committee, composed of MSM and other actors, to promote widespread collaboration in determining an appropriate response. The civil society moved to warn government officials of the negative impact violence against the MSM population could have on AIDS response programs. A number of actions are currently being taken to prevent a repetition of these unfortunate events.

Meanwhile, all persons in Senegal, including MSM, continue to have access to free HIV testing, counseling and support, free antiretroviral therapy, free CD4 and viral load testing, and free medications for opportunistic infections.

ICASA 2008 remains committed to the principles of openness, inclusion, and respect for human rights. The contribution of MSM throughout Africa occupies an important place in the conference program. The Program Committees plan to incorporate all communities, and the homosexual community in particular (see sub-theme 8 of the community program), into the conference. The homosexual community is actively participating in the Local Organizing Committee.

Recognizing that tolerance and openness are essential to overcoming any and all obstacles in the response to AIDS, the government of Senegal has reiterated its commitment to organize the conference and to maintain respect for the rights of the MSM community.

The members of the ICASA organizing committee therefore resolve to take measures to ensure the free participation of MSM in all programs related to the conference and to promote an integrated social environment.