



REMARKS BY

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TO THE

LESBIAN/GAY/BISEXUAL/TRANSGENDER (LGBT)
CORE GROUP

AT THE UNITED NATIONS

*(Leaving no one behind: Equality and Inclusion in the
Post-2015 Development Agenda – Challenging stigma,
violence and prejudice)*

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Allow me to borrow the words of one of the renowned humanitarian of our century, Mother Teresa, that "Human rights are not a privilege conferred by government. They are every human being's entitlement by virtue of his humanity". The Universal Declaration of Human Rights further says "*All people are born free and equal in dignity and rights*".

2. Protection of the rights of all sectors of the population, no matter how small the sector, remains one of the fundamental responsibilities of any leader. A leader is not only responsible to the most powerful group, the richest, the loudest, the largest or those of similar political orientation. The smallest, most vulnerable, most disenfranchised, most excluded, most discriminated sectors of the population should remain highest in a leaders' priority and must be protected.

3. The laws in many of our countries in Africa dehumanise those at highest risk for HIV, such as sex workers, Lesbians, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT), people who use drugs, prisoners and migrants. Yet our constitutions clearly articulate equality for all. Rather than providing protection, these laws render these sectors of our societies much more vulnerable to HIV and unnecessary death due to AIDS related illnesses.

4. We have seen how in our continent, discrimination and stigma have continued to fuel the AIDS epidemic. We have learnt over the years that, as far as AIDS is concerned, bad laws fuel the epidemic. My thoughts and sentiments, today, are premised on a fact proven over and over again - that one of the biggest barriers to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support is discrimination and stigma. That where stigma and discrimination exist, then people are much more likely to be afraid to seek out information, services and other means of prevention, treatment, care and support. That because of fear of stigma and discrimination, people are most likely not going to disclose their status to their families and partners for fear of, among others, violence and rejection. Again, that the fear of the ramifications of discriminatory laws does undermine people's willingness to seek services and support. This is not only fact for AIDS but for most challenges facing our populations and nations.

5. In Africa, one of the most fundamental ideals we have fought is that of non-discrimination on grounds of skin colour, gender, religious orientation and other beliefs. We uphold this ideal passionately. Yet ironically, discrimination against LGBT is still upheld and justified by our same nations and our laws. We have seen violence perpetrated against LGBT in at least three (3) of our countries in East, Central and West Africa. As Champions for an AIDS Free Generation, we have written and appealed to the leaders in these countries to reconsider their positions and rights of LGBT and we will continue our advocacy until justice for all is attained.

6. Chairperson, Honourable Speakers and Guests, the challenges faced by LGBT in the west pales in comparison to those of their counterparts in Africa.

7. We have seen how LGBT in some of our countries have been discriminated and stigmatised when they stood for their human and democratic rights. We have seen the very harsh and violent environments in which they exist. We have seen how our leaders and populations have stoked the fires of their violation and watched and justified their suffering.

8. Adolescent and young people LGBT are at highest risk of HIV infection globally, but especially in Africa. They face double discrimination and stigma, they face violence, are often excluded from services and face other human rights violations. It is our duty as adults and leaders to protect them against these violations and ensure that they grow up with full access to information, testing, treatment and other sexual and reproductive services. They have a right to life, health and freedom from discrimination like everyone else.

9. Despite the destruction that AIDS has had on our nations, AIDS has helped to shatter the silence on issues that our governments and leaders have found great difficulty in addressing. AIDS activism has forced our leaders and governments to address AIDS and LGBT issues. We have seen progress, however slow, in some of our countries where colonially inherited laws discriminating against LGBT have been repealed. Same-sex sexual activity, the most basic right, is now legal in 25 countries in Africa. For the rest of our countries same-sex sexual activity is punishable by imprisonment of differing periods up to life and going as far as the death penalty.

South Africa is the most progressive country in Africa in all LGBT rights laws. In my own Southern Africa region, the one most affected by AIDS, only three countries do not criminalise same-sex sexual activity for both men and women. In 4 countries it is not criminalised for women only while in the remainder it is criminalised for both sexes.

10. The Champions for an AIDS Free Generation Programme, which I chair, is committed to speaking out strongly against discrimination of all groups, especially that of LGBT. Fear of arrest drives the LGBT and other marginalised communities underground, away from information, treatment and care, therefore fuelling the epidemic and unnecessary death and suffering. Our position is that if some sectors of our population are left behind, we cannot claim to be working towards ending AIDS and we cannot claim to have ended AIDS in our countries, on our continent and globally - never.

11. In conclusion, allow me to express my sentiment, that human rights are inalienable/absolute. They cannot change to suit certain sectors or certain circumstances or certain regions or countries of the world. They are inherent entitlements, simply by virtue of being a human being one is entitled to these rights. They should be applicable equally throughout the world. I repeat bad laws, discrimination, violence and stigma fuel the epidemic. As long as these exist, we cannot end AIDS. Africa must break down the barriers and obstacles that fuel discrimination against all groups, especially LGBT. If we do not act now with purpose, urgency and inclusivity, we risk the danger of deepening the divisions in our society, of creating divisive and unjust societies, a legacy of hate and fear for future generations of Africa. We risk the AIDS epidemic once again spiralling out of control.

12. Thank you.