



NATIONAL EMPOWERMENT NETWORK OF PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS IN KENYA.

WORLD AIDS DAY 2014 STATEMENT: GETTING TO ZERO WITH PLHIV LEADERSHIP

On the occasion of World AIDS Day 2014, the National Empowerment Network of people living with HIV/AIDS in Kenya (NEPHAK) gladly joins other stakeholders to renew the commitment to partnership in the response to HIV.

As we prepared for the World AIDS Day, our hope was reviewed by a statement on the latest UNAIDS report: *“the world is embarking on a Fast-Track strategy to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030. To reach this visionary goal after three decades of the most serious epidemic in living memory, countries will need to use the powerful tools available, hold one another accountable for results and make sure that no one is left behind”*. On behalf of PLHIV and affected communities, we call upon the Kenyan Government to join the global community on this Fast Track strategy; use the powerful tools available, hold one another accountable for results and make sure that no one is left behind. We believe this is doable with the available guidelines and the Kenya AIDS Strategic Framework.

The World AIDS Day 2014 theme of ‘Getting to Zero’: Zero new HIV infections; zero discrimination and zero AIDS related deaths best captures the aspirations of PLHIV and affected communities in Kenya. For this to be realized, we must all rally behind the just launched Kenya AIDS Strategic Framework. With HIV combination prevention approach at its center, this strategic framework promises to put Kenya in the path towards ‘ending AIDS’. We are living proof to how HIV treatment can dramatically extend the lifespan of PLHIV and effectively prevent HIV transmission.

HIV – related stigma and discrimination is still high in -Kenya. We are particularly concerned about stigma and discrimination facing children and adolescents born and living with HIV at homes, in schools and at community level. This stigma must stop if we want to win the war on AIDS. We at NEPHAK extend our invitation to the government and other partners to join hands with us to educate communities on how to reduce and eventually eliminate stigma facing children and adolescents born and living with HIV. The bedrock of the AIDS response is an absolute commitment to protecting human rights. Nothing other than zero discrimination is acceptable.

Despite progress, the number of AIDS related deaths is still unacceptably high. One leading threat to PLHIV and which must be addressed is Tuberculosis. TB is still the leading cause of sickness and death among PLHIV in Kenya. Cases of non-communicable diseases among PLHIV are also increasing at alarming levels. Reducing deaths and achieving zero AIDS related deaths shall require that HIV, TB and NCDs treatment, care and management services are integrated.

The World AIDS Day is an occasion to ask where we are with the commitment to accelerate the roll-out of revised HIV Treatment and Prevention Guidelines. The Kenya Government commitment

to identify PLHIV and enroll them on treatment with higher CD4 count as required by the WHO fits well with the new Fast-Track Targets established for the post-2015 era. These targets aim to transform the vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths into concrete milestones and end-points. This is further strengthened by the global consensus that aim for 90% of PLHIV knowing their HIV status, 90% of people who know their status receiving treatment and 90% of people on HIV treatment having a suppressed viral load so their immune system remains strong and they are no longer infectious. Not to forget that the elimination of new HIV infections among children will also require very high levels of coverage of ART among pregnant women, exceeding the overall 90–90–90 targets for treatment. We reiterate that this is the expectation of PLHIV and affected communities in Kenya!

Our World AIDS Day call!

‘Getting to zero’ will require that information, commodities, supplies and services needed to prevent and treat HIV are available to those who need them in a predictable and sustainable manner. This can only be guaranteed with increased investment in HIV and health. Clearly, the Government of Kenya will be required to do more! Our WAD 2014 call is as below:

- The Kenya government (*at both national and county levels*) must increase direct allocation to health and HIV. The rationale for increased investment in HIV response is based on the fact that spending on accelerated scale-up will generate huge health benefits and vastly greater economic returns. Also, increased government allocation will help leverage the support from external partners.
- Renewed commitment is needed to support the active and meaningful involvement of PLHIV as a key principle of HIV response. The engagement of PLHIV networks should be key pillar of the community system strengthening to bolster the role of communities in the response to HIV. Investing in PLHIV networks is the sure way to reduce stigma, improve treatment literacy, strengthen community-facility linkage and facilitate retention to care.
- Foster an enabling legal and policy environment at the national and county level to ensure access to services and justice by PLHIV. This calls for addressing sexual and gender based violence, forced and/or coerced sterilization of WLHIV, harmful cultural practices, early marriages and HIV criminalization. Here, we also commit to work with partners to ensure that the HIV and AIDS Tribunal, which aims to improve access to legal and social justice and protection from stigma and discrimination achieves its mandate as stipulated in the HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Act.
- Strengthen health service delivery system (at national and county level) for the provision of HIV services integrated with essential health package. Provide diagnosis for opportunistic infections, including Tuberculosis and screen PLHIV for other non-communicable disease so that other conditions that lead to unnecessary deaths among PLHIV is eliminated.

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