

**Statement by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay
on the occasion of World AIDS Day**

1 December 2008.

Keeping the Promise: Human Rights and AIDS

GENEVA — This year, we mark both the 20th World AIDS Day and the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is fitting that during these landmark anniversaries we consider how far we have come in the global effort to combat AIDS.

In 2006, UN Member States made a commitment to achieve universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010. Today, fewer people are becoming infected with HIV, and fewer are dying of AIDS-related illnesses. At the end of 2007, three million people in low- and middle- income countries were taking anti-retroviral treatment. But much remains to be done.

Twenty-seven years after AIDS was first identified, stigma against people living with HIV is as strong as it ever was. One third of countries still do not have laws to protect people living with HIV. In most countries, discrimination remains against women, men who have sex with men, sex workers, drug users, and ethnic minorities.

The continued existence of punitive laws on disclosure of HIV status, the criminalization of the transmission of HIV and travel bans for people living with HIV, inadequate protection of women and girls from sexual violence, the marginalization of and hostility against sexual minorities, sex workers, injecting drug users, prisoners and other vulnerable groups all combine to drive them underground and away from HIV services. Like all people, these groups are entitled to the right to health and the full enjoyment of their human rights even though they may engage in activities that are criminalized in some countries.

AIDS thrives on injustice and inequality. A human rights-based response is critical to preventing new HIV infections and mitigating the epidemic's impact – wherever people are, and wherever they live.

In this 60th anniversary year of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, it is unacceptable that accident of birthplace or residence should determine our HIV survival prospects.

On World AIDS Day 2008, let the promise of human dignity enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provide the vision and impetus for reinvigorated efforts to achieve universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support.

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