

MAKE WOMEN CENTRAL IN WORLD STRATEGY TO FIGHT HIV/AIDS

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) has just released a five-point Call for Action to make women central to every strategy in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

“There is a direct correlation between women’s low status, the violation of their human rights, and HIV transmission,” said Noeleen Heyzer, executive director of the Fund, in announcing the Call for Action. “This is not simply a matter of social justice. Gender inequality is fatal.”

“The reason that AIDS has escalated into a pandemic is because inequality between women and men continues to be pervasive and persistent,” she continued. “Too often, women and girls cannot say no to unwanted and unprotected sex without fear of reprisal.”

She pointed out that last year 1.3 million women died of AIDS, that nearly half of all new HIV infections occur in women, that teenage girls in Sub-Saharan Africa are five times more likely to be infected than boys, and that surveys in 17 countries found that over half of girls could not name a method of protection against HIV transmission.

“It is time for the AIDS community to join hands with the international women’s community to hold governments accountable,” she said as she laid out strategies in the Call for Action to challenge the pandemic.

CALL FOR ACTION

1. Guarantee Access to HIV/AIDS Prevention and Treatment

Make female and male condoms affordable and accessible to all. Ensure that National AIDS Councils and National AIDS Strategies incorporate gender balance and gender equality in all policies and strategies. Set up women-friendly centers for voluntary and confidential counseling and testing and referrals. Include detection and treatment of the disease in primary health care.

2. Make Research Gender Sensitive

Disaggregate all HIV/AIDS-related data by gender. Accelerate research to develop women-controlled prevention methods like microbicides and affordable female condoms.

3. Educate and Inform

Disseminate HIV/AIDS and STD information to reach girls and women. Educate adolescents and young people about sexual and reproductive health. Involve women and girls in the design of policies and education campaigns. This should include training materials that enable women to negotiate safer sex and avoid unwanted and unprotected sexual intercourse.

4. Address Gender Inequality in Policy

Recognize and account for women’s role in caring for the infected and supporting families left destitute by the epidemic. Enact and enforce laws to criminalize violence against women. Enforce the Cairo agenda, the Beijing Platform for Action, and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Work to change the social norms and traditional practices that place women at risk, such as early marriage and female genital mutilation. Allocate funds for gender-specific programming to address the pandemic.

5. Address HIV Transmission in Conflict Situations

Ensure gender-sensitive HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention, care, and treatment programs in humanitarian assistance. Strictly enforce the Code of Conduct for peacekeeping personnel to uphold women’s rights and report on sexual violence in peace-keeping and peace-building.

UNIFEM has worked to mainstream gender within the United Nations system and to promote gender equality, women’s development, and human rights in developing countries. UNAIDS has signed a cooperation agreement with UNIFEM to help strengthen the gender perspective in the United Nations’ response to the pandemic.

For more information, visit the UNIFEM Web page on HIV/AIDS at www.unifem.undp.org/hiv_aids.html