



International Community of Women Living with HIV (ICW Eastern Africa)

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Press Statement

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HIV prevention with treatment, not bad laws

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ICW Eastern Africa urges Ugandan MPs to shelve the bill criminalising HIV transmission and invest in antiretroviral treatment, effective in preventing 96% of HIV infection, a new study shows.

Ugandan MPs were meant to debate a bill today forcing Ugandans to test for HIV and disclose to partners their HIV status or they could be taken to court. This bill if passed into law will most likely increase violence against women and be ineffective in curbing HIV infection. Fortunately, the debate did not take place this time but the concerns of women living with HIV remain.

Women go through routine HIV testing in antenatal services when they are pregnant. They are often blamed for bringing the virus in the family when found HIV positive, being the first member to be tested. This bill is likely to increase stigma and discrimination and put women at risk of extreme violence from partners, families and communities but also health services. Women living with HIV in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda have reported last year being coerced into sterilisation because they are HIV positive.

Lack of treatment in Uganda is a major cause of stigma and discrimination. Uganda, like many countries in East Africa, is 'plagued' by constant drug stock-outs, making women go to health services every two weeks when most can barely afford transport and may be turned away if treatment is not in stock. However, a new study by the United States National Institutes of Health shows that 96% of HIV infection can be prevented if people who live with HIV are able to access antiretroviral treatment ([please see UNAIDS 12/05/11 Press Release: Groundbreaking trial results](#)). When health services are not able to provide constant supplies, it increases the risk of HIV infection as treatment interruptions generate treatment resistance.

Last July 2010, Uganda ratified the African Union Protocol on the Rights of Women, during the African Union Summit held in Kampala with a strong commitment to maternal health. The Uganda HIV Prevention & Control Bill, along with the Uganda 'anti-homosexuality' bill, is a step back for the fight against HIV, for women's human rights and for maternal and child health.

ICW Eastern Africa calls on Ugandan MPs to invest in such proven and cost-effective prevention strategies that support women and their families safely access adequate treatment, care and support, a goal the Uganda HIV Prevention & Control Bill will unlikely achieve and only hamper.

For more information, please contact Lillian Mworeko, ICW Eastern Africa Regional Coordinator, mobile number +256 392 947 313.

Please also see the second part of the following article published in The Guardian of 12/05/11, by David Smith and Sarah Boseley: [Uganda's Museveni sworn in as police fire teargas at protesters](#)

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