

With Women Worldwide – A Compact to End HIV/AIDS



Photo: WHO/PIR-Virat

The International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC) has called 2006 a critical year to determine the international community's future response to the global HIV/AIDS pandemic. In the beginning of June, governments and civil society met at the High-Level Meeting on AIDS ('UNGASS+5') to review the implementation of the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on AIDS. In August, the biennial International AIDS Conference (IAC) in Toronto provided an opportunity to reshape dialogue and decisions with an even wider range of leaders. In preparation for these critical discussions, IWHC convened a group of women advocates in Bangkok in November 2005. They developed *With Women Worldwide – A Compact to End HIV/AIDS* as a tool for use in 2006 and beyond. The main goal of the authors was to mobilize extensive support for the Compact Agenda to ensure that it was incorporated into discussions and decisions at the UNGASS+5 and the IAC.

WITH WOMEN WORLDWIDE — A COMPACT TO END HIV/AIDS

Sexual and reproductive rights are a pivotal neglected priority in HIV/AIDS policy, programming and resource allocation. Failure to protect the human rights of girls and women, including their right to health and their right to live free of sexual coercion and violence, fuels the pandemic. Universal access to sexual and reproductive health services and education, and protection of sexual and reproductive rights, are essential to ending it.

It is widely acknowledged that rates of HIV infection are increasing in women in every region in the world, and that these rates are often higher for girls and women than for men. Women, especially young women and girls, are vulnerable because of denial and neglect of their rights, gender inequality, social, cultural and economic factors, pervasive violence, and biology.

Girls' and women's empowerment must be at the centre of a multi-sectoral response to the global pandemic. Regarding sexual and reproductive rights and health in particular, we call on HIV/AIDS decision makers at all levels to:

- 1. Redefine 'High Risk':** Recognize that women, especially young women and girls, are at serious risk, and that all women have the right to have access to confidential, voluntary counselling and testing (VCT), treatment, care and support as part of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services.
- 2. Expand Decision-making:** Ensure that women infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, and women's health and rights advocates, are full participants in decision making, especially at the highest levels, so that decisions reflect the realities and needs of women.
- 3. Exercise Leadership:** Prioritize in words and concrete actions reducing the risk and the burden of HIV/AIDS for women and girls, through protection of their sexual and reproductive rights and health, including

the promotion of policies and laws against discrimination and sexual violence.

4. Invest HIV-targeted Funds: Allocate and monitor the use of significant HIV/AIDS resources for health services and education that protect and empower women and girls, including:

- Comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services accessible to all women with capacity to deliver HIV/AIDS and other STI prevention, counselling, testing, care, and treatment (or referral) services;
- Universal access to subsidized female condoms as well as male condoms, and development and dissemination of microbicides and other women-initiated prevention technologies, and vaccines;
- Comprehensive sexuality education that promotes sexual and reproductive rights, gender equality and skills development, as well as full and accurate information, for all children and youth in and out of school.

5. Strengthen HIV/AIDS Programmes: Protect all women's health and rights through HIV/AIDS programmes:

- Ensure women's access to confidential VCT, including support for the choice not to be tested; provide protection from violence, stigma, and discrimination that may result from disclosure of status;
- Ensure equitable, sustained access to treatment for AIDS and opportunistic infections for all women and girls, appropriate to their age, health and nutritional status, with full protection of their human rights including their sexual and reproductive rights; increase research on and development of appropriate treatment for various ages; and track access to treatment by age, sex, and continuity of care;
- Increase and utilize funds for care and support to reduce women's disproportionate burden of care;
- Provide support for women's economic empowerment in order to reduce their vulnerability.

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