

UN Secretary-General urges countries to follow the United States and lift travel restrictions for people living with HIV

Geneva/New York, 31 October, 2009 — UNAIDS welcomes President Obama's announcement of the final rule removing entry restrictions based on HIV status from US policy. The removal of HIV-related travel restrictions in the US overturns a policy that had been in place since 1987. Such restrictions, strongly opposed by UNAIDS, are discriminatory and do not protect public health.

"I congratulate President Obama on announcing the removal of the travel restrictions for people living with HIV from entering the United States," said United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. "I urge all other countries with such restrictions to take steps to remove them at the earliest."

The United Nations Secretary-General has made the removal of stigma and discrimination faced by people living with HIV a personal issue. He called for the removal of travel restrictions for the first time in his address to the General Assembly during the High Level Meeting on AIDS in 2008. "That they should be discriminated against, including through restrictions on their ability to travel between countries, should fill us all with shame," said Secretary-General Ban in a speech to the Global AIDS Conference in August last year.

At his request, several countries including his home country, the Republic of Korea, are in the last stages of removing travel restrictions. Other countries that are considering removal of travel restrictions include China and Ukraine. In 2008, the UNAIDS board strongly encouraged all countries to eliminate HIV-specific restrictions on entry, stay and residence and ensure that people living with HIV are no longer excluded, detained or deported on the basis of HIV status.

"Placing travel restrictions on people living with HIV has no public health justification. It is also a violation of human rights," said Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS. "We hope that other countries that still have travel restrictions will remove them at the earliest."

Nearly 59 countries impose some form of travel restrictions on people living with HIV. The International Guidelines on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights state that any restriction on liberty of movement or choice of residence based on suspected or real HIV status alone, including HIV screening of international travellers, is discriminatory. Travel restrictions do not have an economic justification either. People living with HIV can now lead long and productive working lives, a fact that modifies the economic argument underlying blanket restrictions; concern about migrants' drain on health resources must be weighed with their potential contribution.

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UNAIDS is an innovative joint venture of the United Nations, bringing together the efforts and resources of the UNAIDS Secretariat and ten UN system organizations in the AIDS response. The Secretariat headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland—with staff on the ground in more than 80 countries. The Cosponsors include UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank. Contributing to achieving global commitments to universal access to comprehensive interventions for HIV prevention, treatment, care and support is the number one priority for UNAIDS. Visit the UNAIDS Web site at www.unaids.org