

Mr. Michel Sidibé
Executive Director of UNAIDS
20, Avenue Appia
CH-1211, Geneva 27
Switzerland.

January 14, 2009

Dear Mr. Sidibé,

Young people working on HIV and AIDS (represented here by seventeen diverse youth organizations) wish to congratulate you on your recent appointment as the new Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS). We are pleased that you were selected for such a key position given your extensive knowledge of the issues involved in achieving universal access. We are particularly happy with your appointment because of your demonstrated commitment to gender equity, support of community involvement in the AIDS response and experience working with developing countries.

As you begin your first term, we encourage you to maintain your support in ensuring the meaningful participation of young people, especially young people living with HIV, at all levels of the HIV and AIDS response. While in the past UNAIDS has supported several youth initiatives and raised awareness about youth AIDS issues, we believe that with your appointment the agency can increase its efforts to build youth leadership and scale-up HIV prevention, treatment, care and support for young people.

We hereby urge you to prioritize the following key points:

Foster youth leadership and build the capacity of new leaders in the HIV and AIDS response: It is vital for young people to voice their perspectives, needs and ideas to policy-makers, and for young people to meaningfully participate at all levels of decision-making and program implementation processes that impact their lives. Young leaders require significant investment through technical training, learning opportunities and mentorship by adult experts. The internship program UNAIDS has implemented for young people at headquarters is one example of a youth leadership program; the quality of the program should be improved and then extended to the regional and national level by all UNAIDS' offices. UNAIDS could also create youth advisory panels that play a substantive role in informing program and policy design at the regional or country level.

We ask for your commitment to ensuring youth participation and leadership within key decision-making bodies at UNAIDS such as the Inter-Agency Task Team (IATT) on Young People and HIV, Technical Support Group on Most At-Risk Adolescents, as well as in local, regional and international forums where the agency is involved. UNAIDS is also a key ally in helping to mobilize crucial resources for youth-led initiatives – we ask that you continue to leverage financial resources for youth-led initiatives working towards Universal Access.

Take urgent action to achieve youth-related Universal Access targets by 2010: We ask that you take bold leadership in guiding countries to respond effectively to stigma and discrimination towards young people, particularly young people living with HIV; to advocate for the availability and access of comprehensive sexuality-education that educates youth about all available choices and is not based on abstinence-only models; to secure youth friendly sexual and reproductive health services including information and counseling that are confidential and non-judgmental for all young people; and to design and implement youth friendly harm reduction services.

In addition, we ask you to consider the special needs and rights of young people who are part of key at-risk populations such as young injecting-drug users, young sex workers and young men who have sex with men, as well as those most affected in some regions such as young women.

We are confident that UNAIDS will greatly benefit from your expertise and leadership. We look forward to continuing our collaboration with you and your team in the future and we wish you a very productive 2009.

If you wish to contact us you can send an email to ahumadac@worldaidscampaign.org or office@youthcoalition.org .

Thank you and Best regards.

Advocates for Youth

CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality

Espolea (Mexico)

Global Youth Coalition on HIV/AIDS (GYCA)

Interfaith Youth Coalition on HIV/AIDS (IYCA – Myanmar)

International Federation of Medical Students Associations (IFMSA)

International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF)

International Planned Parenthood Federation – Western Hemisphere Region (IPPF-WHR)

Positive Youth Outreach

Staying Alive Foundation

Students Partnership Worldwide

World AIDS Campaign

Young Positives

Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights (YC)

Youth Empowerment Against AIDS (Y.E.A.H)

Youth R.I.S.E.

Youth Support Forum (South Africa)

CC.1 Kate Thompson, Chief of Civil Society Partnership Team, UNAIDS

CC.2 Christine Ebrahimzadeh, Senior Advisor, Office of the Executive Director, UNAIDS

CC.3 Jantine Jacobi, Senior Advisor towards Universal Access, UNAIDS

CC.4 Sigrun Møgedal, UNAIDS and Norway's Ambassador on HIV/AIDS