

# Women **WON'T** wait

End HIV & Violence Against Women. **NOW.**

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**PRESS RELEASE:**

**WOMEN ARE STILL WAITING FOR GOVERNMENTS TO REDUCE WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RISK TO VIOLENCE AND HIV&AIDS!**

**International coalition urges governments and donors to keep their promises to women and girls**

NEW YORK, 6 JUNE 2008 - Government officials and AIDS activists from around the world will convene at the United Nations in New York from 10-12 June to review the global HIV/AIDS response. At the UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS (UNGASS) in 2001, governments committed to promote and protect women's human rights and reduce women's vulnerability to HIV&AIDS by eliminating all forms of discrimination including violence against women.

Seven years on, women are still waiting!

Research in 16 countries<sup>1</sup> shows governments have failed to keep their commitments to promote gender equality and women's sexual and reproductive health and rights and end violence against women. This failure also shows governments are not putting women's risk at the center of their AIDS responses.

The research found that "while countries have regulatory instruments in place to counter gender-based violence in all its various forms, the implementation of actions is still highly deficient", said Alessandra Nilo from GESTOS in Brazil, who coordinated the research. This research is part of a concerted effort by civil society to monitor and make visible the hidden gaps in policy implementation.

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<sup>1</sup> Monitoring Ungass's Goals for The Sexual and Reproductive Health of Women, Villela, W.; Nilo, A. Gestos- Brazil, 2008. Countries: Argentina, Belize, Brazil, Chile, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Peru, Mexico, Nicaragua, Thailand, South Africa, Uganda, Ukraine, Uruguay, Venezuela. Access at: [ungassforum.wordpress.com](http://ungassforum.wordpress.com)

Despite continued calls by human rights and women's rights groups, most countries do not have HIV prevention programmes designed specifically for women, much less commitment to promoting and protecting women's human rights. In fact, in some countries there is evidence of HIV prevention related campaigns reinforcing gender stereotypes rather than challenging them.

In Argentina for example, "There remains much to be done especially in developing a protocol and creating specialized care services for women survivors of violence and coordinating the work of different services including health, the criminal justice system etc. Also governments must launch multi-pronged, sustained campaigns that promote women's rights." said Mabel Bianco, Director of Fundación para Estudio e Investigación de la Mujer (FEIM), Argentina who participated in the research.

Many countries have legal and policy frameworks to protect women and girls from violence; however, all countries report poor or no implementation of these policies.

Most worrying is that the research "points to the lack of political will and ability to prevent and redress violence", said Cynthia Rothschild from the Centre for Women's Global Leadership in the United States. This lack of will results in insufficient resources given to programmes to protect women from violence, a lack of specialised medical-legal services for survivors of violence, safe houses for women, etc. In addition, the governments do not even have systematic sex-disaggregated data gathering on the extent and impact of violence against women, said Rothschild.

As we did in 2001, we need to continue putting pressure on governments and donors to track and measure commitments to women's rights and to demand accountability of those in charge of the global AIDS response", said Neelanjana Mukhia, the International Policy and Campaign Coordinator at ActionAid, a member of the Women Won't Wait campaign and its international secretariat.

While decision-makers make empty promises again, it is women like Rhodea from Namibia who continue to bear the brunt. "I was sterilized after giving my birth to my baby. I did not find out about this until I returned for contraceptive counseling after I had my baby. All I was told was that it was better this way. Because I am HIV positive." This experience is confirmed by many of the women across the countries studied who report severe discrimination and rights violations in health systems. These range from forced sterilisation and abortions, to HIV positive women being denied access to information on safe sex practices and prevention products.

There has to be greater urgency, to *really* turn the tide for women" says Nilo. The most effective way is to significantly increase resources for gender-sensitive and human rights based prevention, treatment, care and support – for both epidemics – violence against women and HIV&AIDS ". In particular, there is a need to a shift in focus from targeted interventions to interventions with vulnerable populations. This means that funds and interventions are needed for persons vulnerable to the virus because of their race, class, ethnicity, language and geographic location. Governments and donors have to act with urgency to fulfil their responsibilities to the world's women" Bianco said.

Resources are not the only answer, though. We must ensure that all AIDS prevention, treatment, care and support interventions integrate community education on zero tolerance of violence. In addition, the promotion of laws and law enforcement that prevent and protect women from violence, training for health care personnel and legal

infrastructures, and the availability of post-exposure prophylaxis, emergency contraception, female condoms and other female-controlled prevention ALL need to form part of a comprehensive approach to HIV&AIDS.

**As governments meet to monitor progress on the UN Declaration of Commitment, we urge them to keep their promises to women and girls.**

## **Women Won't Wait!**

*The Women Won't Wait campaign is an **international coalition of organizations and networks** working to promote women's health and human rights in the struggle to address HIV and AIDS and end all forms of violence against women and girls. .*

*For more information on the Women Won't Wait campaign:*

*[www.womenwontwait.org](http://www.womenwontwait.org)*

**Women Won't Wait** is an international coalition of organizations and networks from the global South and North working to promote women's health and human rights in the struggle to comprehensively address HIV and AIDS and end all forms of violence against women and girls. The coalition members are: Action Aid; African Women's Development and Communications Network (FEMNET); Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID); Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL); Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE); Fundación para Estudio e Investigación de la Mujer (FEIM); GESTOS-Soropositividade, Comunicação & Gênero; International Community of Women Living with HIV&AIDS Southern Africa (ICW-Southern Africa); International Women's AIDS Caucus; International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC); Latin American and Caribbean Women's Health Network; Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA); Program on International Health and Human Rights, Harvard School of Public Health; SANGRAM; VAMP; and Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA). National coalitions of the campaign are also operational in Africa, Latin America and Asia.