

Declaration of Commitment:

Young People have the Right to Knowledge and Services

Adopting a human rights approach, the organisations participating in the aidsfocus.ch Conference (21 April 2006 in Berne) commit themselves to fully respect the right of young people to comprehensive HIV/AIDS-information and prevention and to address inequality, injustice and gender discrimination. They will continue to advocate with governments and other institutional actors so that human rights are respected in the context of HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and care. This includes open dialogue about the broad range of subjects related to sexuality and reproductive health as well as access to effective prevention methods.

The participants of the aidsfocus.ch Conference "The Right to Know and the Will to Act. Youth and HIV/AIDS Prevention" (21 April 2006, Berne) want to raise awareness that **Human Rights including the Rights of the Child** are guiding principles in their international cooperation related to HIV and AIDS.

Their basic understanding includes three major issues:

- that children, adolescents, young women and men have the right to knowledge and skills to protect themselves and others from HIV, and the right to determine over their sexuality and reproductive life;
- that young people living with HIV and AIDS have the right to appropriate counselling, treatment and care to mitigate the impact of the epidemic on their lives and give them a perspective to become productive members of their society;
- that young people are to be involved and empowered to meaningful participation in the conceptualization and implementation of prevention programmes and in policy development, making these efforts more effective and reducing discrimination and stigma.

The future of the HIV/AIDS epidemic will be shaped primarily by the action of young women and men, girls and boys. Young people between the ages of 15 to 24 are not only the most threatened group – globally accounting for about half of all new HIV cases – but are at the same time the greatest hope for creating a future, where the spread of AIDS will be slowed and finally stopped.

Access to comprehensive health-related information including sexual education and HIV/AIDS prevention without discrimination is not simply a public health imperative—it is a human right. The Committee on the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to access adequate information related to HIV/AIDS prevention. The United Nations International Guidelines on HIV/AIDS

and Human Rights call on the responsibility of States to ensure universal access to prevention, treatment, care and support by providing legal and regulatory frameworks. This implies that all services and goods (such as advice and support, condoms, antiretroviral drugs, laboratory and medical services) need to be within physical reach and affordable for all, with special attention to the poor, young and female who are more likely to be vulnerable and to be denied this right.

Regarding youth and HIV/AIDS, the guidelines explicitly say that States have to take positive and proactive steps to “ensure the access of children and adolescents to adequate health information and education, including information related to HIV/AIDS prevention and care, inside and outside school, which is tailored appropriately to age level and capacity and enables them to deal positively with their sexuality.”

Access to comprehensive and evidence based information, to sexual health education and HIV-prevention methods is also essential to honour the human rights to the highest attainable standard of health and, ultimately, the right to life. Putting the interests of children and adolescents first (Convention of the Rights of the Child) implies that HIV-related services such as HIV awareness building, counselling, testing, treatment and care need to be made youth-friendlier and accessible, and that young women and men are given space to discuss openly about their sexuality. HIV-prevention methods include male and female condoms, sterile injection equipment, antiretroviral medication (e.g. to prevent mother-to-child transmission or as post-exposure prophylaxis) and, once developed, safe and effective microbicides and vaccines.

Using a human rights approach implies taking into account that HIV/AIDS disproportionately affects vulnerable groups who already suffer from a lack of human rights protection while experiencing discrimination and stigmatization. This approach helps to understand the roots of poverty and injustice, and it encourages recognition of young women and men as rights holders who have entitlements and responsibilities.

Sources:

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and UNAIDS, *HIV/AIDS and Human Rights: International Guidelines* (1998), para 38(g):
www.ohchr.org/english/issues/hiv/guidelines.htm)

OHCHR and UNAIDS Revised Guideline 6 on access to prevention, treatment, care and support (2002);
www.ohchr.org/english/about/publications/docs/g6.pdf

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Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 4, (2003);
[www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(symbol\)/CRC.GC.2003.3.En?OpenDocument](http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(symbol)/CRC.GC.2003.3.En?OpenDocument)

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Goal 6 <http://www.who.int/mdg/goals/goal6/en/index.html>