

Side Event to the 76th Session of the UN General Assembly

ADOLESCENTS & HIV

The role of faith communities in supporting adolescents' prevention, treatment, care, and leadership in the HIV response

Thursday 23 September 2021

Virtual, UNAIDS Platform

Background

The 76th session of the UN General Assembly ([UNGA 76](#)) will be held from 14 to 21 September 2021. UNGA comprises all UN Member States, providing a unique forum for multilateral discussion on the full spectrum of international issues covered by the Charter of the United Nations. The General Assembly is therefore a critical opportunity to call the attention of the world's political and faith leaders to the importance of accelerating the response to HIV, paying particular attention to adolescents and young people who represent a growing share of people living with HIV worldwide.

UNICEF and UNAIDS report that, in 2020 alone, 410,000 [194,000-690,000] young people between the ages of 10 to 24 newly acquired HIV, of whom 150,000 [44,000-310,000] were adolescents between the ages of 10 and 19. Surveys in Low- & Middle-Income Countries (L&MICs) show that only a third of young people aged 15-24 in sub-Saharan Africa had accurate knowledge about HIV transmission and prevention. Levels of knowledge are lower among adolescent girls and young women than in young men, and even lower among those in poverty, rural areas, and lower levels of education. To compound this, recent data indicate that only 25 per cent of adolescent girls and 17 per cent of adolescent boys aged 15-19 in Eastern and Southern Africa – the region most affected by HIV – have not had access to HIV testing - in the past 12 months and received the result of the last test. The testing rates in West and Central Africa and South Asia are even lower. If current trends continue, hundreds of thousands more adolescents and young people will acquire HIV in the coming years, and without knowing their status, they will miss out on life-saving treatment. Additionally, a large population of children who acquired HIV vertically over the last decade are growing into adolescence.

Exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, this situation demands an urgent global response, and faith leaders and communities are critical elements of that response.

Faith communities, including faith-inspired health service providers, faith-based organizations and religious leaders, make distinctive contributions to the paediatric and adolescent HIV response using several distinctive assets: providing a large proportion of HIV services; promoting community outreach through faith community groups; creating demand for HIV services using places of worship and religious schools; advocating to address stigma and discrimination, and sexual and gender-based violence. Yet, also in faith settings, more can be done to promote adolescents' autonomy and capacity to lead the response.

Objectives:

This side event is organized by the UNAIDS-PEPFAR Faith Initiative with faith communities and groups with the purpose to:

- Provide faith leaders and representatives of FBOs and communities with a clear sense of the main areas of action related to adolescents and HIV from the 2021 Political Declaration on Ending Inequalities to End AIDS and the 2021-2026 Global AIDS Strategy
- Hear from adolescents about their lived experience, challenges and recommendations to the faith sector
- Identify key interventions through which faith leaders, communities and groups can support reaching the new prevention, testing, treatment and viral load suppression targets for adolescents

- Engage FBOs and faith leaders in the 12Million Campaign by committing to key actions that could promote greater access to HIV services for the adolescents who are living with HIV and are still not on quality and consistent HIV treatment, care and support
- Share promising practices by FBOs and faith communities for better health outcomes among adolescents, especially on interventions led by adolescents and young people themselves

Format:

The event will comprise two short panel sessions followed by an interactive debate among representatives of faith groups, governments' officials, senior UN and international organization's officials, and leading civil society representatives, including of networks of people living with HIV and adolescents.

Agenda:

Facilitator – *Wole AMEYAN, Technical Officer, Adolescent HIV, Global HIV, Hepatitis and Sexually Transmitted Infections Programmes, WHO*

Welcome and opening remarks

- *Dr. Shannon Hader, Deputy Executive Director, Programme, UNAIDS*
- *Dr. Angeli Achrekar, Acting U.S Global Aids Coordinator and Special Representative for Global Health Diplomacy, PEPFAR*

Setting the Scene

- *Dr. Chewe LUO, Director HIV, UNICEF: Adolescents & HIV in the context of COVID*

Prayer: *Michelle Njiru*

Music: *Rap song on Operation Triple Zero by young person from Kenya*

Session 1: The challenge in front of us

Franklin Wanyama, EDARP Kenya – Eastern Denary AIDS Relief Programme

Brian Kipchumba, Kenya

Venessia Fernandes, Human Touch, India

Session 2: Lessons learned:

- i) *Gladys Mukaratirwa Programme Coordinator at Chiedza Community Based Orphan Welfare: Paediatric and adolescent adherence to ART support groups, Zimbabwe*
- ii) *Anthony Mtali Ngwira, Country Programs Coordinator, New Apostolic Church Relief Organization (NACRO): Family Interventions for Adolescent HIV Prevention in Mpamba, Nkhata Bay, Malawi*
- iii) *Tiffany Riggelman and Colin Moody, The Luke Commission: Teen Clubs in Eswatini*

Discussion

Closing and way forward

Sandy Thurman, Chief Strategy Officer, Office of the US Global AIDS Coordinator and Health Diplomacy, US Department of State

Suki Beavers, Director, Gender Equality, Human Rights and Community Engagement, UNAIDS

Prayer: Fr. Richard Bauer, Eastern Deanery AIDS Relief Programme (EDARP), Kenya

Languages: The meeting will be held in English and French.

Link: It will be shared through the [Interfaith Health Platform](#)