



PRESS RELEASE

The African Union and UNAIDS, as Chair of the H6 partnership, join forces to tackle sexual and gender-based violence and health in humanitarian crises

Action-based partnership to support women and girls announced by health and political leaders at a high-level event at the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly

GENEVA, 24 September 2018—UNAIDS, the Chair of the H6 partnership (six United Nations bodies working on health-related issues), and the African Union have pledged to enhance their collaboration to eliminate sexual and gender-based violence, prevent HIV and protect women's health and rights in humanitarian settings.

A new programme of work on this common agenda was announced at a special high-level event held in New York, United States of America, on the margins of the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly.

"We are gathered here to coordinate our efforts among the African Union and the United Nations to plan and intervene so that people's rights are protected, HIV is prevented and the right to health is promoted," said Faustin-Archange Touadéra, the President of the Central African Republic, who chaired the meeting.

The rise in the frequency and scale of humanitarian crises is having a devastating impact, particularly on women and children. In 2017, around 68 million people were forcibly displaced globally as a result of persecution, conflict or generalized violence—an increase of 2.9 million from 2016 and a new record high.

"We know that it is time to act. More than 2 billion people live in countries affected by fragility, violence and conflict—most are women and girls. This is unacceptable. We need political visibility and intensified international cooperation to eliminate gender-based violence and protect the health of women and children in humanitarian settings," said Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS and H6 Chair.

UNAIDS will support the African Union in developing a joint African Union–United Nations plan of action. The plan will include developing training and awareness tools for uniformed personnel in peacekeeping operations and ensuring better reporting rates on sexual exploitation and violence against women and girls.

"The partnership between the United Nations and the African Union provides an opportunity to reinforce each other's work and employ joint and comprehensive responses to the needs of vulnerable populations in crisis situations," said Smail Chergui, African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security.

Protecting the health and rights of women and young people will be critical to mitigating fragility, conflict and disaster. It is estimated that 60% of all preventable maternal deaths occur in humanitarian and conflict settings, which equates to nearly 500 deaths each day.

“In South Sudan, 52% of our young sisters are married before their 18th birthday. I urge leaders not to remain loudly quiet. We call for the inclusion of women in political processes. It is our bodies, our lives and our futures at stake. We have the right to the highest attainable standard of health, whether in conflict or not,” said Riya William Yuyada, Executive Director, Crown the Woman, South Sudan.

There are currently too few successful programmes to prevent gender-based violence during conflict and against refugee populations. Studies have shown that violence against women and girls increases during periods of conflict, with rape and other forms of sexual violence often being a common practice of war.

“It’s not about silencing the guns, we must recognize that women and children have a right to life and a right to health and a right to peace. This is where we should put our energies and time to make sure women and girls are protected,” said Bience Gawanas, the United Nations Secretary-General’s Special Adviser on Africa.

The United Nations’ [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and the African Union’s Agenda 2063 have created an important political window. The new commitments provide a timely opportunity to enhance collaboration on human security and humanitarian health, in the context of the recently adopted [Joint United Nations–African Union Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security](#).

“We must not explain why we are partnering, but why we are not partnering to eliminate sexual and gender-based violence and protect the health and rights of women and children in humanitarian settings. If we care about addressing the root causes of deprivation and poverty and abuse, women and girls are the heart of the matter,” said Sigrid Kaag, Minister of Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, Netherlands.

Among the commitments made by UNAIDS and the African Union is to work to ensure that there is adequate funding to strengthen coordinated programme implementation for the responses to sexual exploitation and abuse and HIV in humanitarian settings. This enhanced cooperation between the African Union and the United Nations will be paramount to ensuring sustainable people-centred peace, security and development.

For more information on the new partnership between UNAIDS and the African Union, go to unaids.org

ADDITIONAL QUOTES

Deborah Birx, United States Global AIDS Coordinator and Special Representative for Global Health Diplomacy

It’s not just about the funds, it’s also about policies, laws and justice for girls and children, especially considering that 60% of the African continent is under 20 years old.

Elhadj As Sy, Secretary-General, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

They need peace, they cry for peace, yearn for hope and try to retain the human dignity that they have lost along the way. It is the last piece of cloth, as we say in Africa, that is torn apart by gender- and sexual-based violence. Protection should not come as an afterthought.

Michaëlle Jean, Secretary-General, Organisation internationale de la Francophonie

Violence, rape, assault against women and young girls and boys is worldwide and can be likened to a weapon of mass destruction. We are here to do more against all forms of discrimination and crimes committed against women.

Pramilla Patten, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict

Shame, stigma and the risk of reprisals and lack of access to services lead to chronic underreporting. By isolating victims and cutting them off from medical care and support, stigma facilitates the spread of HIV.

Armed conflict creates conditions that allow HIV to flourish, including through rape, sexual slavery, and trafficking and exploitation, in environments where the rule of law and public health services may have collapsed.

Bintou Keita, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations

Female peacekeepers are now being deployed to facilitate dialogue as well as women protection advisers for a more comprehensive approach to peacekeeping. Peacekeepers are also the ones who provide civilian peace and security, men and women who are committed to provide the best peace they can.

Lorena Castillo de Varela, First Lady of Panama

Since I started this journey with UNAIDS and the United Nations, two powerful words have guided me: zero discrimination. The challenges faced by women and children—particularly in humanitarian settings—are fuelled by stigma and discrimination, creating obstacles that block access to vital health services, such as HIV testing and life-saving medicines. Zero discrimination should fill every space in the world.

Martine Moïse, First Lady of Haiti

Haiti has known its fair share of natural catastrophes, from earthquakes to hurricanes, making women and girls particularly vulnerable. In Haiti, gender-based violence is also all too common. I support fully the fight against violence against women and gender-based violence. This is a fight that must involve all.

Laure-Marie Kitanu, Coordinator of the Network of Women Living with HIV, Democratic Republic of the Congo

We have cried out to the international community for help in regard to HIV testing and prevention and we implore you to maintain the priority of peace and stability so that we have a long-lasting solution. We commend this African Union and UNAIDS initiative.

Written contribution from Ashraf El Nour, Director, International Organization of Migration Office to the United Nations, New York

The International Organization of Migration calls upon African Union governments and partners to ensure the fulfilment of the right to health for migrants, regardless of their status, in order to enhance the resilience of populations living in vulnerable conditions. The failure to do so not only jeopardizes the public health safety of vulnerable groups, but also that of entire communities where they reside.

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UNAIDS

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) leads and inspires the world to achieve its shared vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. UNAIDS unites the efforts of 11 UN organizations—UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, UN Women, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank—and works closely with global and national partners towards ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals. Learn more at unaids.org and connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.

African Union

The vision of the African Union is that of: “An integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in global arena. This vision of a new, forward looking, dynamic and integrated Africa will be fully realized through relentless struggle on several fronts and as a long-term endeavour. The African Union has shifted focus from supporting liberation movements in the erstwhile African territories under colonialism and apartheid, as envisaged by the OAU since 1963 and the Constitutive Act, to an organization spear-heading Africa’s development and integration.

H6

The H6 partnership harnesses the collective strengths of UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women, WHO, UNAIDS and the World Bank Group to deliver technical support and advance the Every Woman Every Child Global Strategy in support of country leadership and action for women’s, children’s and adolescents’ health. The H6 is presently chaired by UNAIDS. Learn more at <http://www.unaids.org/en/topic/H6>

