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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by International AIDS Society, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



Statement

On behalf of the International AIDS Society, the world's leading independent association of HIV professionals, with more than 16,000 members in 196 countries across the world, we express our deep appreciation for the opportunity to review the agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women on the theme of the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS. Over and above our strong support for the many crucial issues raised by this landmark statement, we reiterate the need to remind member States and all concerned to look again at paragraph 15 (uu) of the conclusions, in which the Commission encourages nations and societies to conduct research and collect sex- and age- disaggregated data and develop gender-sensitive indicators, as appropriate, to inform policymaking, conduct assessments in a coordinated manner, and measure progress in the sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including in the context of HIV/AIDS, and identify the obstacles and stereotypes men may face in assuming increased caregiving responsibilities.

Significant improvement in addressing this gender gap in research is still required. Slightly more than half of all adults living with HIV worldwide are women. In sub-Saharan Africa, women bear a disproportionate burden of HIV, constituting nearly 60 per cent of adults living with HIV in the region. Younger women are even more vulnerable and data suggests that girls of 15 to 24 years of age are eight times more likely to be infected with HIV than boys in the same age range.

Overcoming harmful social norms, promoting gender equality and empowering women are essential to boost the HIV response for women and girls. As part of this overall objective, it is critical to be more focused on the equitable inclusion of women in research to address specific questions related to HIV infection in women, by increasing their representation in clinical trials. In medical research, a matrix of social, ethical, policy and regulatory factors have contributed to the historical exclusion and underrepresentation of women in research, particularly in the area of clinical research.

Despite women being equally, if not more, affected by the HIV epidemic, they remain an overlooked population in research. Women constitute a small proportion of clinical trial participants, and it is rare that the design or findings of studies are analyzed to specifically investigate the effects of interventions on women. The special needs of women during adolescence and after menopause, and other special circumstances pertaining to women, are overlooked areas in research.

Systematic analysis of data to identify potential gender-based differences is more an exception in reporting than the rule. This failure results in health interventions being less evidence-based for women than for men.

Health outcomes can differ between men and women. Hence, accounting for gender differences in health research is essential and central to holistic and evidence-based response.

Standards for the reporting of clinical trials have been established to ensure the provision of complete, transparent and critical information. Uniform requirements for manuscripts submitted to biomedical journals, as well as a set of well-recognized and widely used guidelines and biomedical journals for authors, should similarly

emphasize the ethical obligation of authors to present data analyzed by gender as a matter of routine. Journal editors are also promoters of ethical research, and adequate standards of reporting and requirements for the inclusion of gender analyses should be integrated into editorial policies as a matter of urgency.

Research institutions must promote gender diversity, which has been demonstrated to benefit innovation, productivity and scientific excellence. Gender balance in teams has been shown to increase the collective intelligence of the team. Sensitivity to gender issues enhances opportunities for stimulating the research process.

The organization calls on the international community to:

(a) Recognize the indisputable evidence that gender imbalance in health research affects the quality of evidence-based health interventions for women and transgender women, and consequently their health and well-being. This awareness should inform all levels of research and development strategies and funding mechanisms. Convening dialogue between scientists, funding agencies, journal editors and gender experts would help to ensure that mainstreaming actions bring about the desired gender equality improvements;

(b) Ensure that explicit requirements are stipulated for gender considerations to be included in all levels of HIV research. This would encourage better design at an early stage and result in more women in clinical research, fostering better science;

(c) Encourage scientific authors and editors to follow strict guidelines on the reporting of sex-disaggregated data and to conduct gender analyses in published literature;

(d) Move towards more gender-balanced, collective and cooperative systems that welcome diverse leadership styles and facilitate a more distributed problem-solving role/process;

(e) Ensure that the evidence on how gender shapes and is shaped by science is embedded in the science curriculum across all levels. These insights should be communicated to the public to make science more relevant to women, men and transgender people, thus challenging negative gender stereotypes;

(f) Create research cultures that provide flexible working environments that support the careers of women and men equally by improving the way gender and diversity are managed in universities and research organizations;

(g) Promote closer collaborations between schools and universities to support efforts to recruit more women into research by mentoring and investing in women scientists.