

Liberian Civil Society Organizations Buttressing the National HIV Response

Position Statement at 2018 World AIDS Day Commemoration in Liberia

December 1, 2018

His Excellency George Manneh Weah
President of the Republic of Liberia

Ambassador Clar M. Weah
First Lady of Liberia

Dr. Whelimina Jallah
Minister of Health and other officials of the Ministry

Officials of National AIDS Commission, National AIDS Control Program,
Representatives of the joint United Nations Team in Liberia, distinguished invited
guests, ladies and gentlemen.

The Liberian Civil Society Organizations buttressing the National HIV Response comprising persons infected and affected by HIV is pleased to join other countries around the world to commemorate this year's World AIDS Day.

Observe on the 1st of December every year, World AIDS Day is dedicated to raising awareness about the HIV and AIDS pandemic; providing a platform to reflect on the achievements made in the national HIV response and to embrace with optimistic solidarity people living with HIV.

The campaign aims at ensuring quality treatment and support for persons living with HIV and advocating for the reduction of stigma and discrimination in society against families infected and affected by the virus.

During this celebration, we remember millions of people who have died to AIDS related complications since the 80s. HIV and AIDS remain serious health threat to the survival of mankind in the world.

It is estimated that more than 40,000 persons in Liberia are living with (with the general prevalence at 2.1%).

In this estimate, 13, 110 (30%) of persons living with HIV is on treatment, 1800 Pregnant Women need treatment yearly and 1,553 (86%) receive treatment. We have more new HIV infections occurring every year, while annual deaths stand at 2,500.

Distinguished guests, the slow pace of scale up of Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) services continue to create huge treatment gap which has resulted in illness and deaths among persons living with HIV in Liberia.

As we renew our effort, we want to draw the attention of the Liberian Government to four (4) challenges that we think are undermining the national HIV response effort in Liberia and must be addressed.

Stock-Out of Antiretroviral drugs

This is a serious concern in the Country and we hope something can be done to address it because persons living with the virus need the drugs to live. We have observed with dismay, an ineffective supply chain management in Liberia.

The systems have failed miserably to control the distribution of drugs to various facilities in the country where persons living with the virus can access

ARVs for children to some facilities like JFK, Redemption, Catholic and ELWA has been a major problem. For example, there has been perpetual shortage of cartages for viral load machine.

Lost to Follow Up

Because of weak supply chain system which is contributing to stock-out, many persons living with HIV had lost confidence and have given up in seeking treatment at various facilities. Another factor contributing to lose to follow up is the influence of traditional and religious healers who said they have cure for HIV.

We call on the government of Liberia especially the Ministries of Internal Affairs and health to investigate this matter because it is undermining the response. They do not do follow up anymore, a very important aspect to their survival.

Empower the Network of Persons living with HIV

In order to decentralize treatment opportunities in all sectors of the country, it is important to reactivate the associations of persons living with HIV across the country because they will serve as ambassadors in creating awareness.

The lack of national Headquarters and county offices for the network of people living with HIV have made the coordination of its work almost impossible

Currently, Network of Persons living with HIV, an umbrella organization of persons living with HIV in the country does not have an office.

The last time this organization had an office was when Population Services International was renting an office which is now closed due to lack of funding. Logistics is also a major problem facing LibNet+ because we are unable to reach out to the 15 counties to monitor drug stuck out.

We are also experiencing lack of funding to enhance transportation to the various counties has created the situation where counties' structures for persons living with HIV can no longer be reached.

We appeal for adequate funding capacity to keep those structures active and keep raising awareness on HIV issues.

Prioritize Key population access to healthcare services

The lack of access to medication for key and vulnerable populations including sexual minority persons living with HIV and AIDS in rural communities still stands as a challenge that needs to be addressed

Funding for key population needs to be directed to strategic organization to ensure sustainable ownership, greater involvement of local structures and increase visibility.

As it is done in other countries, we are recommending to President George Manneh Weah to appoint a representative of persons living with HIV as one of the commissioners or board members at the National AIDS Commission as a means of directly involving persons infected with the virus in Liberia.

We believe that if these above concerns are addressed, 90% of persons living with HIV will know their status, 90% of those tested positive will get on treatment and 90% of Persons living with HIV on treatment will have a suppressed viral load by 2020.

May God bless the National HIV response and safe Liberia.

Thank you.