

# Women **WON'T** wait

End HIV & Violence Against Women. **NOW.**

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **HIV&AIDS PROGRAMMES AND FINANCIAL ALLOCATIONS CONTINUE TO FAIL WOMEN AND GIRLS**

#### **International coalition urges donors and governments to act with URGENCY**

(New York) — On its one year anniversary, the Women Won't Wait. End HIV and Violence against Women. NOW! Campaign remains concerned that women's rights still occupy the margins of HIV&AIDS strategies and funding. The campaign was launched on International Women's Day— March 8, 2007—to demand that policy makers and donors integrate responses to violence against women in global and national AIDS programmes and allocate resources to these responses.

“As we did one year ago, we continue to ask that commitments be tracked and measured and to demand accountability of those in charge of the global AIDS response”, said Neelanjana Mukhia, the International Policy and Campaign Coordinator at ActionAid, a member of the Women Won't Wait campaign and its international secretariat.

“Women and girls in every community of the world daily confront the devastating impacts of gender inequality, violence and discrimination. While violence against women and girls can lead to HIV, violence also follows infection as HIV positive women and girls become easy targets for stigma, discrimination and violence. Unless the global AIDS response acts now, to address gender inequality and violence against women, the HIV pandemic will not be stopped”, said Mukhia.

This is confirmed by Ann, an HIV positive mother of two from Haiti who states: “Today, I feel braver and I want violence against women and HIV to stop. I know that the only way to fight it is by challenging it. And that I, an ordinary woman, have the right to a life of dignity.”

Research and statistics consistently confirm that worldwide, violence and the threat of violence increase women's risk to HIV. Women now make up 61% of those living with HIV and young women make up 70% of young people living with HIV in Sub Saharan Africa<sup>1</sup>, says Therese

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<sup>1</sup> UNAIDS (2007). 2007 AIDS EPIDEMIC UPDATE. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.unaids.org/en/KnowledgeCentre/HIVData/EpiUpdate/EpiUpdArchive/2007/default.asp>

Niyondiko, the Acting Director of the African Women's Development and Communications Network (FEMNET), Kenya. Violence and gender inequality also inhibit women's ability to access information, to go for testing and counselling, or to disclose their HIV status. Stigma, discrimination and other human rights violations, alongside, fear of abandonment or eviction from homes and communities, present extreme challenges, particularly for women who lack economic means.

“Although there has been an increase in awareness that violence against women is a driver and consequence of HIV, this has not resulted in real changes on the ground for women and girls. Awareness must turn to action, and has to happen NOW”, said Serra Sippel, Executive Director of the US-based Center for Health and Gender Equity. “There has to be greater urgency, to *really* turn the tide for women”, said Sippel.

Mabel Bianco, Director of Fundación para Estudio e Investigación de la Mujer (FEIM), Argentina, adds that, “The most effective strategy to address the intersection of violence against women and girls and HIV is to significantly increase resources for gender-sensitive and human rights based prevention, treatment, care and support—for both epidemics—violence against women and HIV&AIDS”. Governments and donors have to act with urgency to fulfil their responsibilities to the world's women”, Bianco said.

The campaign advocates that resources also need to be accompanied by clear guidelines and policies to ensure that all AIDS prevention, treatment, care and support interventions integrate community education on zero tolerance of violence. In addition, the promotion of laws and law enforcement that prevent and protect women from violence, training for health care personnel and legal infrastructures, and the availability of post-exposure prophylaxis, emergency contraception, female condoms and other female-controlled prevention ALL need to form part of a comprehensive approach to HIV&AIDS.

On International Women's Day 2008, the Women Won't Wait campaign echoes its previous call for accountability from decision-makers, donors and activists to speed up effective responses to the linkages of violence against *all* women and girls and the spread of HIV. In so doing, the campaign lays the foundation for future International Women's Day celebrations.

*The Women Won't Wait campaign is an **international coalition of organizations and networks** working to promote women's health and human rights in the struggle to address HIV and AIDS and end all forms of violence against women and girls.*

For more information on the Women Won't Wait campaign:  
[www.womenwontwait.org](http://www.womenwontwait.org)

**Women Won't Wait** is an international coalition of organizations and networks from the global South and North working to promote women's health and human rights in the struggle to comprehensively address HIV and AIDS and end all forms of violence against women and girls. The coalition members are: ActionAid; African Women's Development and Communications Network (FEMNET); Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID); Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL); Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE); Fundación para Estudio e Investigación de la Mujer (FEIM); GESTOS-Soropositividade, Comunicação & Gênero; International Community of Women Living with HIV&AIDS Southern Africa (ICW-Southern Africa); International Women's AIDS Caucus; International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC); Latin American and Caribbean Women's Health Network; Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA); Program on International Health and Human Rights, Harvard School of Public Health; SANGRAM; VAMP; and Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA).