



In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Message from

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to the

WORLD AIDS DAY

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"Universal access and human rights" is the theme that has been chosen to highlight World AIDS Day 2009. This reflects the need to protect human rights and ensure access for all to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. Human rights ... do we ever actually stop and think about our basic human rights? Do you know your own rights? Who grants you your rights? Human rights are a God-given gift to all mankind. All people are born equal and it is our duty to observe, protect and defend the rights of all our fellow humans, including those of us who have acquired HIV.

It is your right to work, marry, travel, to have shelter, to live in safety and in health, and to have children. These are rights that we all take for granted. Sadly, for people living with HIV this is often not the case. Too often they find themselves denied their rights—marginalized, denied a job, denied health care, denied the right to get married and have children, and with no scientific or medical grounds for such discriminatory treatment. How would you feel in this situation, denied your rights because you have an illness of which others are fearful and judgemental? The truth is that many of our societies have failed to address such breaches of the rights of people living with HIV. Every day we hear stories from around the world, including countries in our region, where HIV infection is the only reason given for denying them their rights.

The WHO Constitution states that: "*the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being...*" irrespective of this person's sex, lifestyle, social and financial status, or any type of illness they may have. Observing the right to health means preventing illness, treating it and caring for the health of the ill. It means that no one should be denied health on the basis of our social or legal judgement of their behaviour or lifestyle. In the community, in health care settings and even in prisons, all individuals have the right to the highest attainable health standard. "*Health for All*" is a fundamental value in WHO's work. This means that all of us—men, women, children, youth, adults, people living with HIV, key populations at increased risk of HIV, poor, rich or marginalized—have the right to health. Claiming this right for ourselves does not come without assuming responsibility for protecting the rights of others.

Help us light a torch and shine its beam on human rights for people living with HIV and those at risk of acquiring it. You have a responsibility. When you know better you can do better. Make the promise today to support people living with HIV/AIDS.