



The Pakistan Transgender Empowerment Association aims to raise a voice for transgender community rights and issues at national level²⁴ November 2017 – As part of a series of events organized to mark World AIDS Day on 1 December 2017, the Wajood, a community-based transgender community organization in Pakistan launched the Pakistan Transgender Empowerment Association: voice for social change and empowerment at a ceremony on 24 November 2017 in Islamabad.

Participants at the ceremony were welcomed and introduced to the work of the Association by Ms Bubbli Malik, Wajood Executive Director, and Ms Aisha. Ms Malik shared the objectives, mission and way forward of the Association, stating that the transgender individual in Pakistan faces multilayered social and legal discrimination.

“It is the honour of the Wajood organization to launch the Pakistan Transgender Empowerment Association: Voice of Social Change and Empowerment, with the objective to spread awareness and raise a voice for transgender community rights and issues at national level. Violence, poverty, human rights violations, socioeconomic inequality, lack of education, insufficient legal services, and deficiencies in law enforcement institutions are some of the significant barriers faced by the transgender community in every day. The transgender community has gone too many years without a collaboration or coalition. Now it is time for the community to work together and develop the collaborative network which will benefit the community now and for future generations. The community understands its needs better than others and can work better for its rights and needs; the association hopes to involve community-based organizations, community members, and leaders, to do work for the community by the community,” Ms Malik said.

“Our vision is to bring together diverse professionals dedicated to advocating for transgender community rights and who have a common interest in empowering the transgender community. We aim to mobilize and unite gender and sexual minorities for the development of best practices, and support policies nationwide that promote better initiatives, health system research mechanisms, the right to education, to live with dignity, and to have respect for transgender, intersex, and gender-variant people in all cultural settings. We believe that transgender people have the resilience, brilliance, and power to transform society,” she continued.

“Dr Baseer Achakzai, the National Programme Manager of the National AIDS Control Programme of the Government of Pakistan, is the prime focal point to provide across-the-board HIV treatment and care services without prejudice. According to the latest National Integrated Biological and Behavioural Surveillance survey, there is an estimated transgender population in Pakistan of almost 36 000 in 23 big cities, especially in the 4 big cities of Karachi, Lahore, Faisalabad and Multan.

“Transgender people are one of the groups most affected by the HIV epidemic and are 49 times more likely to be living with HIV than the general population. The term “transgender” refers to people whose gender identity and expression are different to social expectations of their biological sex at birth. They may see themselves as male, female, gender non-conformist, or one of a spectrum other genders. Transgender people have diverse sexual orientation and behaviours,” Ms Malik stated.

“Across the world transgender people experience high levels of stigma, discrimination, gender-based violence and abuse, marginalization and social exclusion. This makes them less likely or able to access services, damages their health and wellbeing, and puts them at higher risk of HIV. Overlapping social, cultural, legal and economic factors contribute to pushing transgender people to society’s margins. Transgender people are more likely to have dropped out of education, had to move away from family and friends, and faced workplace discrimination, limiting their educational and economic opportunities. They can encounter problems accessing basic health care and other services. More targeted prevention approaches are needed in combination with increased welfare and employment opportunities to address the specific needs of transgender people. We as a society should remember that each individual in the country, including transgender people, have the basic human right to seeking health care services including HIV treatment and care without discrimination. Only by doing so will we be able to address the gap between the recorded and the huge estimated number of HIV cases in Pakistan,” Ms Malik concluded.

Dr Assai Ardakani, World Health Organization (WHO) Representative to Pakistan, said, “I am very happy to be a part of the launch ceremony of the Pakistan Transgender Empowerment Association, and I congratulate all of you in this endeavour and hope it will bring prosperity to the lives of the transgender community in Pakistan. I see it as a great opportunity for the empowerment of the transgender community in Pakistan, but let me stress that you need to raise your voices and get them heard by those who can support you, in order to get empowered. The community must advocate for universal access to health, social services, education, employment, and rule of law and accountability mechanisms, and people should understand that transgender people are part of this community. The right to health and the right to access quality health care services should be exercised by all, including the transgender community. Practicing safe sex should be advocated and supported within the transgender community. I believe that like other people, you should be aware of disease transmission, and we hope for the day when there is not a single transgender person suffering from AIDS. Attitudes towards marginalized communities is changing – now various education institutes, for example, the Allama Iqbal University, is offering free education to the transgender community in Pakistan. The judgment of the Supreme Court of Pakistan – declaring transgender people as full and equal citizens of Pakistan – is a big milestone in the history of the country. WHO acknowledges the health needs of the transgender community, and when it comes to HIV and sexually transmitted diseases, testing and treatment facilities should be accessed by transgender people to get their status tested and to access a wide range of HIV prevention services which can help them to maintain a life without HIV. WHO strongly advocates that all forms of stigma and discrimination, within or outside the health system, should be recognized and stopped. Similarly, all people should be protected from all forms of violence and human rights abuses.”

Dr Mamadou Lamine Sakho, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) Country Director, stated that “Today am pleased that the Pakistan Transgender Empowerment Association has been launched. As we celebrate World AIDS Day 2017, it is my pleasure to express my gratitude to all people from civil society organizations and community-based organizations, and people living with HIV, as well as the government, and the public and private sectors, for their high commitment and personal endeavour to contribute to ending AIDS by 2030 in Pakistan. Reinvigorating HIV prevention among key populations requires domestic investment to provide key populations with tools that can empower them to raise their voice for their rights, and this association will definitely be one such platform which will help strengthen the voice and agency of the transgender community. Pakistan is championing in the response to HIV and making progress towards protecting the rights of the transgender community, and this association will help further strengthen the capacities of this community to access universal health coverage and in particular HIV testing treatment, care and social support services.”

Tuesday 23rd of April 2024 02:31:33 PM