



# INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

**Statement by the**

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**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

Mr. President,  
Distinguished Ministers,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor for me to speak on behalf of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

The IPU is assisting parliaments to deal with the issues of HIV/AIDS through its Advisory Group on HIV/AIDS, a group of committed MPs from all over the world who have been working hard to raise awareness of the need for legislation.

I am a member of parliament from Japan's House of Councilors, one of the IPU Advisory Group on HIV/AIDS, and a person living with HIV.

As has been pointed out many times at this High Level Meeting, parliaments and their members have very important responsibilities in helping to curb the epidemic of HIV/AIDS.

Legislation is double-edged sword. It can take peoples lives away if a wrong decision is taken, but at the same time, if it is applied with high spirit, it can save many lives and empower many people.

For example, many countries have adopted positive legislation such as legislation that prohibits discrimination against people living with HIV, legislation for school-age children to be educated on how to protect themselves from HIV, and laws that institute and protect harm reduction services, and so on.

Yet at the same time, laws criminalizing the drug-use, sex workers and men who have sex with men represent a significant legal impediment to implementation of harm reduction programs. When a person is labeled as criminal, it makes more difficult for him to go and ask for treatment. Some countries even criminalize HIV transmission, which will not ensure justice or prevent transmission.

In other words, without careful consideration HIV-specific legislation can easily stigmatize people with HIV, demotivate them for testing, and give them a false sense of security. It makes a huge difference whether or not parliamentarians are aware of this or not.

Fortunately, more and more parliamentarians have come to recognize the importance of their leadership on HIV/AIDS. Under the auspices of the IPU, they have held a series of meetings to discuss the challenges posed by HIV/AIDS and develop inter-parliamentary dialogue on the issue. It is our conviction that repealing or amending punitive legal approaches to the epidemic would create a more effective environment for HIV responses.

The IPU Advisory Group on HIV/AIDS provides members of parliament with access to relevant policy expertise and skills to properly exercise their duties of lawmaking, oversight, leadership and advocacy. Special attention is paid to the protection of rights and the objective of achieving universal access to treatment, prevention, care and support.

Another key theme being pursued by the IPU Advisory Group on HIV/AIDS concerns access to HIV medicines. The provision of affordable antiretroviral treatment, which has improved the quality and prolonged the lives of many people infected with HIV, is a subject that encompasses human rights, intellectual property law and trade regulations. It is an important and complex field, in which the legislator can do much to set the right framework for enlightened policy.

The Advisory Group provides guidance to the national parliaments to support the enactment of appropriate intellectual property legislation and move countries closer to achieving universal access to HIV treatment.

Another important area where the Advisory Group is taking action concerns HIV-related restrictions on entry, stay and residence. Last year, the IPU governing bodies adopted recommendations calling for a complete elimination of HIV-related travel restrictions, opening the way for legislative reform which will bring this discrimination to an end. Since then, China and Namibia have repealed or amended their legislation. We hope that the countries that still impose these restrictions will join the growing list of countries that have lifted travel restrictions for non-nationals living with HIV.

The IPU also works to strengthen global parliamentary leadership on HIV/AIDS. Stigma and discrimination persist as an immense barrier to voluntary counseling and testing, treatment, care and support, all of which are essential elements in a successful HIV response effort.

The IPU Advisory Group on HIV/AIDS believes that it is a crucial time for parliamentarians to do more to engage with their constituencies on HIV/AIDS, and take a stronger and more visible stand in speaking openly about the disease and pushing back the forces of stigma. Its members encourage their fellow parliamentarians to stand up and speak out for groups that are most disadvantaged as a result of prejudice, discrimination and ignorance, and thereby prevent creation of further vulnerabilities on which the epidemic thrives.

The IPU also works to mobilize parliamentary involvement in major international HIV/AIDS events. Earlier this week the IPU and UNAIDS organized a parliamentary meeting on the occasion of the 2011 High Level Meeting on AIDS. I would like to highlight that the parliamentarians present at that meeting expressed the wish to continue to be involved in the work of the United Nations. They undertook to follow up on the debates and conclusions held during our meeting and the High Level Meeting in their respective countries.

When I was 19 years old, I sued the Japanese government with other hemophilia patients over HIV-contaminated blood products. Though I was the big force involving many young people and media who sympathized with my cause, if parliamentarians hadn't picked up our voices such a huge advance in HIV/AIDS treatment would not have been possible in Japan. Their legislative actions not only advanced HIV treatment, but also erased my distrust in politics, and here I am, a 35-year old MP, happily married, living with HIV.

The experience sixteen years ago convinced me that everybody has freedom of choice, free will to live how they wish to live regardless of their illness or environment.

The mission of parliamentarians is not just to give remedy to people in need, but to create an environment in which everyone can choose how they live with pride, dignity, and the freedom of choice. I want to let every single Member of Parliament in the world know how beautiful and exciting their mission is, no matter how challenging it may look sometimes.

The IPU will be there to help members of parliament implement this noble mission and commitments at the national level.

YES, making move in politics is not always easy; sometimes we feel very frustrated that things don't move as quickly as we wish. When I feel that way, I always think about my friends and colleagues who share the same sentiment, and of friends who passed away with no treatment.

So after this conference, when you go back to your country and feel the same way, please reach out your hands, let's hold hands across national borders, let's unite in solidarity. Please remember me, as a living witness.

Thank you.

