



SAY NO! TO CRIMINALIZING HIV TRANSMISSION

For more than 20 years, those most involved in the fight against AIDS -including people living with the virus, fought against the ostracization and discrimination of people living with HIV. For more than 20 years these same people continue to exhaust themselves so that the rights of People Living with HIV are not trampled on. It took more than 20 years for certain modest laws to be drafted to protect people living with HIV; more than 20 years for them not to be seen by some as plague-carriers.

But it only took one or two years in an atmosphere of complete ignorance and indifference -and this includes numerous organizations and institutions- for repressive laws to be approved, more and more each day, that criminalize the transmission of HIV and turn those living with the virus into public health dangers. They will no longer be persons living with a virus, but purely vectors of transmission, potential contaminators!

From now on, in a world where someone has to take the blame for society's ills and life's ups and downs, where the law will meddle in our lives on the most intimate level, HIV+ people become the target of choice. Just when some are announcing the banality of HIV, that discrimination has become less frequent, just when governments nationally and internationally are congratulating themselves on the progress made in the fight against AIDS, HIV+ people are being attacked in courts of law for not having told their partners that they may have engaged in "risky practices" in the past. Today, HIV+ people are ordered to list their past and future partners. There are those who believe that the specter of jail is a new prevention tool, bringing absurd hope that criminalization will push back the epidemic, while it in fact creates fertile ground for it to thrive.

Will we soon be seeing children taking their parents to court because they were infected while they were in their mother's womb, during birth or by their mother's milk? Soon, people living with HIV will have to stop having sex! Even protected sex! Even freely consenting partners will stop having sex for fear that the condom might break, for fear that they will infect their lovers despite precautions they took together, and for fear that the relationship will end in a court-case. They will soon have to go underground again.

It is time once again to remind the world that being HIV+ does not mean becoming a danger to public health. In the North as in the South regardless of the cultures, traditions and societies in which we live, to threaten persons living with HIV with prison, compelling them to be afraid of their sexuality, forcing to them reveal their HIV status in a way that is humiliating in order to travel, to qualify for insurance, to get married, to have children or participate in an international conference is decidedly unjust.

Despite the reality of scientific progress and the advances made in care and treatment, despite the support of those who care, families and nations, it is now very difficult to live with HIV. The right to live a normal life goes hand and hand with enduring support, renewed solidarity, and permanent respect, certainly not through humiliation, rejection and fear.

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