

“Human Rights as a Conscious Achievement”

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I want to start by honoring the Creator for what has been created here. I am truly humbled by this incredible opportunity. I want to thank the city of Vienna, acknowledge **all** of the Dignitaries, my Colleagues and my Friends.

This 18th International AIDS Conference has been a true testament to what we can accomplish when we share a mission. Even as we’ve explored evidence on prevention, funding for universal access and the value of early treatment for HIV/AIDS, our mutual strategy is to **press forward in our fight for human rights and against the devastating effects of HIV and AIDS.**

Commonly, we aspire **to live in a world free from stigma** and discrimination irrespective of who we are, where we come from and what we believe in. This is a great challenge, **but I strongly believe** we can get there through our collective power.

We gathered here in order to take on the **shared responsibility** of delivering on our commitment to **Universal Access** to prevention, treatment, care and support to all those who **need it.**

We have examined both our successes and our failures. By doing this we have **strengthened each other.**

We have collectively reaffirmed that Human Rights and HIV Prevention Justice are the cornerstones of our universal response to HIV and AIDS

Around the world we face systemic human rights violations. Globally, **women and girls face daily struggles** against violence, inequality, violations of sexual and reproductive rights, such as forced sterilizations, criminalization of sex work and of HIV transmission.

Around the world we can’t deny that HIV travels the well-worn path of gender inequality. I **envision a world where this inequality no longer exists and where the human rights of women are consciously upheld.**

As your positive Sister in this world I have witnessed inequality, discrimination and injustice. With you by my side I am no longer alone and marginalized. As you stand here with me today

I can feel changes and say yes to “Rights Here, Right Now” Moving forward-can our lessons bring real victories towards achieving real Human Rights for all Women?

- **We must meaningfully involve women and girls living with HIV in all aspects of policymaking**, program development, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation – and we need **properly resourced programs that address the reality of our lives.**
- **We must accurately capture data on the social and economic factors that lead to increased vulnerability and worse health outcomes for women and girls**, in all of our diversity, including transgender- women.
- **We must end the criminalization** and violation of the rights of women living with HIV and AIDS, especially for women behind bars, women who use drugs, and sex workers.
- **We must support responses that address** inequality and Violence Against Women in all regions, irrespective of the type of epidemic.

For all people we have to ensure that:

- Communities are able to access HIV education, prevention, testing and counseling services that meet their needs. **We must** eliminate all funding for abstinence-only programs that fail young people by violating their right to life saving information.
- **All people with HIV have the right** to work, have a full and satisfying sexual life, bear children, and access high quality HIV care that meets their needs.

Let us now look to the future.

In two years , we welcome you to our nation’s capitol in Washington DC – please understand that you will be coming to a country that is still very much a work in progress when it comes to addressing the HIV epidemic within our own borders. We require your support to end the AIDS crisis both inside and beyond our borders. No one person or country has all the answers and we all have much to learn.

But I am proud that for the first time the USA has developed its' own National AIDS Strategy - something our previous government felt was not a priority. ALSO under the leadership of **President Barack Obama**, my country has finally lifted its outrageous travel ban on HIV-positive people entering the country! **This** makes it possible for the 19th International AIDS Conference to return to the US after a 23-year absence!!

Another win is that Congress has finally voted that federal dollars can be used to support needle exchange programs. This is a vote for Human Rights, a vote for evidence-based prevention, and a **powerful reminder that clean needles save lives.**

But we face many difficulties in the USA.

We witness more and more people being placed on **waiting lists** for life saving ARV's. **We have enormous wealth** but many people, including those with **HIV, are homeless.** 1 in 4 persons living with HIV in the USA is **estimated to spend time behind bars each year.** More than half of all African American Men Who Have Sex with Men **are HIV positive.** And every 9 and half minutes a person is infected with HIV, **disproportionately people of color and women. In fact,** over 60% of all new HIV infections diagnosed in women are **among women of color, primarily African American women.**

In my country, infections through **all modes of transmission have increased,** and overall HIV **prevalence in Washington DC is higher than some countries with severe epidemics.** Stigma is very much alive. The rights of people living with HIV are routinely violated, and religious leaders are **just** beginning to understand their role in this epidemic.

So please understand, **you will be coming to a country that needs your assistance.**

Bearing in mind these challenges, let us affirm our commitment to the work we must achieve during the next two years, where ever we live.

When we reconvene in two years we must be able to declare that:

- **We stood** by our commitment to reach Universal Access and kept HIV on the global agenda as a human rights imperative.
- We ensured that HIV remained among the highest funding priorities for our leaders.

- **We continued** to support people with HIV to advocate for themselves **and** their communities
- **We created space in programs and at** decision-making tables for women living with HIV
- **My sisters, we have prepared ourselves to assume leadership positions at the** local, national and international levels of policy.
- We mentored young people and supported their leadership.
- We have provided information about HIV and AIDS regardless of language or access to technology.
- **We made sure that men, women and trans women behind bars** have access to prevention, treatment, care and support services with full respect for their human rights, and their specific needs.
- We defended the rights of all people who use drugs and ensured that they have access to the full range of services including harm reduction.

We have our work cut out for us!

Right now, as we end this conference, let us resolve to greet Washington DC with unforeseen strength borne of the vows echoed Right here. This fight is not over-it is just beginning, from Vienna's shores to Washington DC. We will hold each other and our elected leaders to their obligations and their promises to fight HIV and AIDS around the world.

Human Rights here-Right Now!

Say it with me- Human Right here, right now!

Please allow me to thank a few of my major affiliations: Philadelphia FIGHT, CHAMP, ICW Global, US Positive Women's Network, ACT-UP Phila, Penn CFAR, the Conference Coordinating Committee for inviting me to speak today, my family back at home and all of you who travelled from far and wide to attend this conference and ... I pray your travels home are safe and May Peace be Unto You.