



STATEMENT ON ZERO DISCRIMINATION DAY COMMEMORATION

-1ST MARCH 2021-

Every year on 1st March, Eswatini joins the rest of the world to commemorate Zero Discrimination Day. We use this day to celebrate the right of everyone to live a full and productive life and live it with dignity. Zero Discrimination Day highlights how people can become informed about and promote inclusion, compassion, peace and, above all, a movement for change. Zero Discrimination Day is helping to create a global movement of solidarity to end all forms of discrimination. On Zero Discrimination Day this year, UNAIDS is highlighting the urgent need to take action to end the inequalities surrounding income, sex, age, health status, occupation, disability, sexual orientation, drug use, gender identity, race, class, ethnicity and religion that continue to persist around the world.

Discrimination and inequalities are closely intertwined. Intersecting forms of discrimination, be it structural or social, against individuals and groups can lead to a wide range of inequalities—for example, in income, educational outcomes, health and employment. However, inequalities themselves can also lead to stigma and discrimination. It is critical, therefore, when looking to reduce inequalities to address discrimination.

Eswatini Commitment to end stigma and discrimination

The Kingdom of Eswatini has united in the global action to reduce stigma and discrimination related to HIV and AIDS through the creation of a supportive stigma reduction framework to inform implementation of the HIV and AIDS policy, advocacy and programming. The overall objective is to determine manifestations of stigma, discrimination and human rights violations against PLHIV in the Kingdom of Eswatini. The most common indicators of stigma and discrimination include rejection, isolation, moral judgments, self-exclusion and human rights violations. HIV related stigma and discrimination hinders access to prevention, treatment, care and support services. Among people living with HIV, stigma and discrimination contributes to late disclosure of HIV status and initiation on treatment as well as adherence to treatment.

The HIV stigma index report, 2019 presents a picture of the current situation in terms of stigma and discrimination among people living with HIV in the Kingdom. The most common reported stigma and discrimination was being targets of discriminatory remarks by other people and being verbally harassed. People Living with HIV (PLHIV)

mentioned that discriminatory remarks are through different phrases which portray PLHIV as being promiscuous, sick and unproductive. Despite, this derogatory remarks against them, PLHIV have developed internal resilience and the survey depicts that HIV related stigma and discrimination is experienced by fewer people. However, discriminatory attitudes and prejudice against PLHIV exist in communities and manifests through gossip during social gatherings. Disclosure of HIV status is difficult for PLHIV. The survey presents the need for PLHIV, and HIV and AIDS programme implementors to plan, educate, raise awareness and implement HIV stigma sensitive programmes.

Ending inequality

Inequality is growing for more than 70% of the global population, exacerbating the risk of division and hampering economic and social development. COVID-19 is further hitting the most vulnerable people the hardest, even as new vaccines against COVID-19 are becoming available, there is great inequality in accessing them. Many have equated this to vaccine apartheid. Confronting inequalities and ending discrimination is critical to ending AIDS. The world is off track from delivering on the shared commitment to end AIDS by 2030 not because of a lack of knowledge, capability or means to beat AIDS, but because of structural inequalities that obstruct proven solutions in HIV prevention and treatment. For example, recent research shows that key populations are twice as likely to acquire HIV if they live in a country with punitive approaches to sexual orientation than if they live in a country with supportive legislation.

Tackling inequality is not a new commitment. In 2015, all countries pledged to reduce inequality within and between countries as part of the Sustainable Development Goals. But it is not yet one that the world has delivered on. As well as being core to ending AIDS, tackling inequality will also advance the human rights of people who are living with HIV, make societies better prepared to beat COVID-19 and other pandemics and support economic recovery and stability. Fulfilling the promise to tackle inequality will save millions of lives and benefit the society as a whole. To do this, we must confront discrimination in all its forms.

Despite the challenges that still persist, Eswatini has made significant strides in dealing with HIV related stigma and discrimination. But prejudice directed against PLHIV remain and manifests through demeaning reactions towards PLHIV at social gatherings, and the labelling of PLHIV with derogatory phrases. Despite, PLHIV have strong resilience as most were of the view that living with HIV has no effect in their lives. In fact, some have even developed negative attitudes. Disclosure of HIV status is still difficult for PLHIV. Family members and associates become aware of the HIV status of PLHIV through other people, and without the consent of PLHIV. This undermines the rights of PLHIV to consent for the disclosure of their HIV status.

National solidarity

Ending inequality requires transformative change. Greater efforts are needed to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger and there is a need to invest more in health, education, social protection and decent jobs. But to achieve dignity for all, political,

economic and social policies need to protect the rights of everyone and pay attention to the needs of disadvantaged and marginalized communities. We can all play our part by calling out discrimination where we see it, by setting an example or by advocating to change the law. We all have a role to play in ending discrimination and so reducing inequalities. Participate in this year's Zero Discrimination Day by shining a light on inequalities and doing your part in helping to address them.

