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## **An Open Letter to President Yoweri Museveni from The Global Network of People Living with HIV (GNP+)**

The Global Network of People Living with HIV is deeply concerned about the new anti-LGBTQ bill recently passed by the Ugandan parliament. We would like to highlight its devastating consequences towards the health of our constituency, the people living with HIV in Uganda, and urge President Museveni not to sign this bill into law.

Uganda is one of the successful countries in the fight against the AIDS epidemic, this success shown by a significant reduction of new HIV infections from 88 000 in 2010 to 54 000 in 2021, as well as reduction of AIDS-related deaths from 51 000 in 2010 to 17 000 in 2021. Further, in 2020, only the Government of Uganda had invested US\$ 462, 799, 745 from their domestic budget to fight HIV and AIDS.[1]

This achievement is threatened by this new bill, whose impact will create barriers for many people living with HIV, to access treatment that is needed to prolong their lives and ensure quality of life. Consequently, many people who are highly impacted by HIV will go underground and refuse to seek health services, including HIV prevention services. The country risks backtracking on gains that have been realised so far towards achieving Global AIDS 95 - 95 - 95 targets. People living with HIV who have achieved viral suppression can no longer have the ability to sustain their treatment, those with higher risk of acquiring HIV will no longer access prevention and diagnostic services due to fear of prosecution.

Decades of research show punitive legislation targeting people living with HIV and Key Populations fuels stigma, discrimination, inequality, and the risk of violence. People who are criminalised are more likely to acquire HIV because criminalisation makes them less able to access health services, to prevent HIV infection. For this same reason, they are also less likely to know their HIV status, be on treatment, or be virally undetectable. When people are virally undetectable, HIV treatment has lowered the level of the virus in their blood to levels so low, that they can no longer transmit HIV. The Uganda PLHIV Stigma Index study report published in 2019 showed that 10.87% of participants were advised not to mother/father a child by a healthcare worker.[2] This number will increase dramatically with the signing of this bill.

Our 40 years of experience in fighting the AIDS epidemic have shown that, once you lose control of this epidemic, you will not have the ability to protect the general population from HIV infection and will severely impact political and economic stability in Uganda. Countries making the most progress in their national HIV programmes are ones that have adopted most of the laws and policies recommended by evidence, while those that have not done so, continue to report growing epidemics and rising death rates. Countries with constitutional rights to health, report better health outcomes than those that do not recognise or implement these rights.

We strongly believe that our effort in combating the HIV epidemic must be based on science and evidence, instead of prejudice or bias and therefore, we would like to convey our sincere ask for the government of Uganda to revisit the recently passed anti-LGBTQ bill for the sole purpose of humanity and ensuring quality of life for people living with HIV in Uganda.

We thank you for your attention.

Signed,  
The Global Network of People Living with HIV

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[1]UNAIDS DATA 2022. Geneva: Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS; 2022. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

[2] NAFOPHANU (2019), *The PLHIV Stigma Index, Country Assessment, Uganda*