



Women Arise. New Global Coalition Focused on Women, Girls and HIV

Women leaders of diverse networks and organizations from every region of the world have announced at the United Nations the creation of a new global coalition called Women ARISE. The initiative was developed and is sponsored by 35 international women's groups and regional and global networks, including those that advocate for the rights of and are run by HIV positive women, sex workers, and young people. Despite their different countries, languages, ages, and focus of work, they have joined together to counter the continued lack of action in five key areas that impact women and girls living with and affected by HIV. These are **Access, Rights, Investment, Security, and Equity**.

Women ARISE members are working together to galvanize and promote a common agenda on women and girls' rights in the AIDS response. They are focusing on these five areas of action:

- **Access:** to information, services, prevention, care, treatment, support
- **Rights:** sexual and reproductive health and rights, property, inheritance, non-discrimination, equality, justice
- **Investment:** budgets and funds for women and girls
- **Security:** mental, physical, psychological, financial
- **Equity:** education, empowerment, resources

Women ARISE launches as the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is conducting a 15-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action and its goals related to HIV/AIDS. UNAIDS has also unveiled at the CSW its new *Agenda for Accelerated Country Action for Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV*.

"With HIV the leading cause of disease and death among women of reproductive age worldwide, we have no more time to waste on more promises or pilot projects—we need action now on women, girls and HIV," said Mabel Bianco, Coordinator of Women ARISE, President of FEIM (Fundación para Estudio e Investigación de la Mujer), and Coordinator of the International AIDS Women's Caucus. "The year 2010 has got to be a turning point. We have come together as Women ARISE to call for immediate implementation of the UNAIDS operational plan at the country level. That is the only way to stem the rising rates of HIV transmission among women and girls in Latin America, Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe."

As a new and powerful coalition, Women ARISE is committed to focusing attention on the serious problems that women and girls in all their diversity face in regard to HIV/AIDS. The stigma and discrimination encountered by all people living with HIV are magnified for women and girls because of persistent gender inequality. HIV positive women are ostracized in their communities, afraid to seek treatment, and lack fundamental support, care, and services. After its launch and advocacy work at the CSW, Women ARISE will seek to raise the visibility and presence of women and girls at the [International AIDS Conference in Vienna in July 2010](http://www.aids2010.org). (<http://www.aids2010.org>)

"We welcome the work of Women ARISE as we are working to make sure that women and girls' perspectives, voices, and realities are taken into account at the International AIDS Conference taking place this July in Vienna," said Robin Gorna, Executive Director of the International AIDS Society and a speaker at the launch event. "Three decades into the AIDS pandemic, AIDS is now the leading cause of death among women of reproductive age. Yet the needs of women and girls living with HIV are still not met. We urgently need more research into the impacts of HIV treatment on women. Reliable research is the only way to ensure that better treatments are developed and tailored to the unique needs of women and girls—who have too often been excluded from the early stages of trials—and to guarantee that women and girls can access the care and support services they need."

"Gender inequality is one of the main drivers of the HIV epidemic," stated Nyaradzai Gumbonzvanda, General Secretary of the World YWCA, a member of Women ARISE speaking at the launch event. "Young women and girls are especially vulnerable to sexual violence and coercion, putting them at great risk of contracting HIV. Empowered communities of women around the world are uniting and pushing for equal access to education, prevention, treatment, and services. We ask governments and the UN to accelerate positive action in our communities. They must fulfill the commitments they made on sexual and reproductive health rights and HIV at the Beijing World Conference on Women 15 years ago. Action is needed now."

Some key statistics on women and girls and HIV are:

- Over 15.7 million women are living with HIV—half of all adults living with the virus.
- In sub-Saharan Africa, approximately 60% of adults living with HIV are women.
- One-third of women living with HIV are between 15 and 24 years and young women are 1.6 times more likely to become HIV positive than men of their same age.

"We know what to do to stop rising rates of HIV transmission for women and girls—the UNAIDS operational plan lays it out," stated Sheila Tlou, Co-chair of the Global Task Force on Women and the former Minister of Health in Botswana. "But to be effective, the UNAIDS agenda must be accelerated at the country level and all of the UN agencies must work together to support and implement it."

More information on Women ARISE click on the following links:

- Key Messaging Document: <http://www.geoffreyknox.com/documents/WomenARISE-keymessagingdoc.pdf>
- Member Organizations: <http://www.geoffreyknox.com/documents/MemberorgsWomenARISE.pdf>

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