



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Global Commission on HIV and the Law Reviews Legal Barriers Blocking Progress on HIV and AIDS in Eastern Europe and Central Asia

Chisinau, 17 May, 2011. Governments and activists gather in Chisinau this week to look at how the law and its application can help promote effective responses to AIDS in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. On 18-19 May 2011 more than 110 representatives from 13 countries will meet for the Regional Dialogue of the Global Commission on HIV and the Law. This is the third regional dialogue of the Global Commission, which was established in June 2010. The regional dialogues are supported by UNDP and UNAIDS.

Participants will discuss legislation and law enforcement practices in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, which often lag behind national HIV policies. EECA is the only region in the world where the HIV epidemic remains on the rise. There are now approximately 1.4 million people living with HIV, with Ukraine and Russia accounting for about 90 percent of the new HIV infections. Access to antiretroviral (ARV) treatment remains low, with only 19 percent of adults who need treatment receiving it. Of particular concern are vulnerable groups, such as injecting drug users, who account for about 60 percent of the new HIV infections, as well as people in prisons and police jails. People living with HIV continue to experience severe social stigma and often cannot rely on the protection of specific anti-discrimination laws. In eight countries, laws prescribe women who use drugs to lose custody of their children. Five countries do not allow opioid substitution therapies; drug use is made a crime in six countries. Three countries criminalize sex work; two countries criminalize consensual same sex relations among adults. Many countries of the region continue to experience problems with the regular supply with ARVs, due to high prices of medicines and other factors.

According to UNDP Associate Administrator Rebeca Grynspan, *“The law and its application can have a profound impact on the lives of people, especially those who are marginalized and disempowered. The law is a powerful instrument to challenge stigma, promote public health, and protect human rights. We have much to learn from the positive and negative experiences in this region on the interactions between the law, legislative reform, law enforcement practices, and public health responses.”*

The purpose of the Regional Dialogue is to provide the Global Commission with evidence about legal and policy provisions to HIV. From regional perspective, the Dialogue is a unique opportunity for representatives of vulnerable communities to speak up and share their concerns and experience with the Commissioners, as well as with government representatives.

“We must stand shoulder to shoulder with people who are living with HIV and who are most at risk. By transforming negative legal environments, we can help tomorrow’s leaders achieve an AIDS-free generation”, said UNAIDS Executive Director, Michel Sidibé.

The meeting provides a valuable chance for civil society and government representatives to engage in a constructive discourse about ways to improve the situation of people living with HIV, specific steps to be taken, and possibilities for cooperation.

“The equal treatment of people living with HIV and adequately addressing the special needs of our vulnerable groups is crucial for the ample response for HIV in our countries, said Grigory Vergus, Head of ITPC-Russia and member of the Regional Advisory Group supporting the Regional Dialogue. Mainstreaming human rights in our laws and practices is not only the right thing to do now - it is a strategic investment in the fate of the future generations.”

Note to the editors:

The Global Commission on HIV and the Law was launched in June 2010 by UNDP on behalf of the UNAIDS family to provide global leadership on HIV-related legal and human rights issues by: analyzing interactions between legal environments, human rights and HIV; fostering evidence-informed public dialogue on the need for rights-based law and policy in the context of HIV; and identifying clear and actionable recommendations with and specific plans for follow-up.

The Commission, chaired by the former President of Brazil Fernando Henrique Cardoso, comprises 15 members, eminent leaders in their fields and public life, who provide global leadership on issues of HIV and the law.

For more information see www.hivlawcommission.org , or contact:

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