



## ***Press Release***

### **UN dialogue to strengthen laws in the African continent's fight against HIV**

**Pretoria, South Africa,** August 4, 2011 – The United Nations Development Programme has convened a consultative meeting in Pretoria for HIV experts, people living with HIV, civil society and government representatives to discuss key aspects of HIV and the law in Africa.

The Regional Dialogue, which is the sixth in a series of seven regional consultations globally, is being held to learn from individuals, communities, policy and law makers, judges and law enforcers. The dialogues are an opportunity for those affected by and vulnerable to HIV, including those whose voices are silenced by restrictive legal environments, to be heard. The objective of the Africa Dialogue is to provide a forum for governments and civil society in Africa to share information and experiences on creating enabling legal environments, addressing legal barriers and stigma and discrimination in the context of HIV.

Among the high profile delegates to the Dialogue, which was officially opened by South Africa's Commissioner Simone Jiyane Deputy Director General in the Justice Department, are eleven of the Global Commissioners including Bience Gawanas (Commissioner for Social Affairs, African Union), Hon. Michael Kirby (retired judge of the High Court of Australia) and Mr. Stephen Lewis (Co-Director of AIDS Free World, Canada and former UN Envoy on HIV/AIDS for Africa).

The meeting will address the impact of HIV-related law and policy relating to the marginalization and criminalisation of people living with HIV and those vulnerable to HIV; gender inequality and violence against women; discrimination in the context of HIV; access to HIV-related treatment; and issues of HIV and children.

Speaking at the opening ceremony United Nations Resident Coordinator for South Africa Dr Agostinho Zacarias said *"The UN in South Africa has partnered with the Government of South Africa and other stakeholders to respond to HIV/AIDS to ensure the achievement of the four zeros: zero new HIV infections, zero AIDS-related deaths and zero discrimination and zero new babies born with HIV."*

Sub-Saharan Africa is more heavily affected by HIV and AIDS than any other region of the world. An estimated 22.5 million people are living with HIV in the region - around two thirds of the global total. In 2009 around 1.3 million people died from AIDS and 1.8 million people became infected with HIV. Since the beginning of the epidemic, 14.8 million children have lost one or both parents to AIDS.

The Dialogue is of particular importance to the continent in that while a lot of resources are being put into reducing HIV infections and fight the virus, legal environments that strengthen action against discrimination and violence in the context of HIV need to be strengthened in many Africa countries.

*“In the last few months, experts have reported on important scientific advances in the field of AIDS. If these scientific developments are to truly benefit those most in need, human rights and law will play a critical role. Using the law to address issues of criminalization of HIV and those most at risk, violence and discrimination against women, social protection of orphans and vulnerable children, and intellectual property rights and treatment access will be crucial for unleashing the potential of science to transform the HIV epidemic and response for the continent”,* says Dr. Mandeep Dhaliwal UNDP Cluster Leader for HIV, Human Rights, and Governance.

The outcomes of the Dialogue will inform the Global Commission on HIV and the Law and assist in the development of recommendations based on real life experience of those most vulnerable to and affected by HIV.

**For more information, visit [www.hivlawcommission.org](http://www.hivlawcommission.org)**

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**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 analysing what is known about the interactions between the 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 a concrete plan for follow-up. ([www.hivlawcommission.org](http://www.hivlawcommission.org))

The members of the Commission are: former President of Brazil, Fernando Henrique Cardoso (Brazil, Commission Chair), Justice Edwin Cameron (South Africa), Ms. Ana Helena Chacón-Echeverría (Costa Rica), Mr. Charles Chauvel (New Zealand), Dr. Shereen El Feki (Egypt, Commission Vice-Chair), Ms. Bience Gawanas (Namibia), Dame Carol Kidu (Papua New Guinea), the Honourable Michael Kirby (Australia), the Honourable Barbara Lee (United States), Mr. Stephen Lewis (Canada), His Excellency Mr. Festus Mogae (Botswana), Mr. JVR Prasada Rao (India), Professor Sylvia Tamale (Uganda), Mr. Jon Ungphakorn (Thailand) and Professor Miriam Were (Kenya).