

MEDIA ADVISORY

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Touching Lives...

International AIDS Candlelight Memorial demands governments' commitment to improve the lives of people living with HIV

On Sunday 15 May 2011, tens of thousands of people worldwide will light a candle on occasion of the 28th International AIDS Candlelight Memorial. Community-based organizations in some 115 countries will use the event to remember those who have lost their lives to AIDS-related illnesses, to support those living with HIV and affected by its impact and to spur calls to action for greater awareness.

"The International AIDS Candlelight Memorial is an essential platform that allows the global health community to advocate for needed change," said Global Health Council president and CEO Jeffrey L. Sturchio. "The Candlelight Memorial brings new voices to the fight against HIV/AIDS at an important time in the trajectory of the epidemic."

Over 600 community organizers in 83 countries have registered at www.candlelightmemorial.org. These organizers together with the national and regional coordinators are currently preparing events in their communities, villages and towns.

With the theme "Touching Lives..." the Candlelight Memorial is highlighting how HIV has touched the lives of many people. "Touching Lives..." also refers to how an improved HIV response with more treatment access, better prevention methods and respect for human rights and dignity touches the lives of people living with and affected by HIV.

"The Candlelight Memorial is important to people living with HIV," said Kevin Moody, CEO of the Global Network of People living with HIV. "The memorial is more than a moment to remember our loved ones. It is a moment to look forward to the future of the HIV."

"The only way to honor those who have passed away, is to do everything to improve the lives of people living with HIV," he said.

In 2011, the Candlelight Memorial falls three weeks before the United Nations General Assembly High Level Meeting on AIDS (HLM). Ten years ago, UN member states committed to achieving universal access to treatment, prevention, care and support by 2010. Universal access has not been achieved, but HIV treatment is working to slow down the HIV epidemic. HIV treatment keeps people living with HIV healthy, more productive and lowers the risk of transmitting HIV to others. To improve the lives of people living with HIV, a successful High Level Meeting will be important.

In June 2011, the member states are coming together to review progress and chart the future course of the HIV response. Civil society and people living with HIV want the governments of the member states to commit to:

- Achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support by 2015;
- Respecting, protecting and fulfilling the human rights of people living with, and those most affected by HIV;
- Introducing and promoting laws to protect the rights of people living with, and those most affected by HIV. Governments should review their laws, practices and policies and amend any that cause barriers to accessing HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services;
- Involving people living with HIV meaningfully in decisions on national, regional and global levels of the HIV response;
- Ensuring that country level HIV responses are transparent, accountable and inclusive of those most affected by HIV, particularly women and girls, young people, men who have sex with men, transgender people, sex workers and people who use drugs.

Media are encouraged to contact the coordinators in their countries and communities to join and experience the International AIDS Candlelight Memorial.

To find contact details of a coordinator near you, please visit the list of community coordinators:
http://www.globalhealth.org/forms/candlelight/management/reports/coordlist_2011.php

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