

**COMMUNIQUE**  
**PANCAP/UNDP Caribbean Regional Parliamentarians Forum**  
***What can parliamentarians do to end AIDS by 2030?***

**Kingston, Jamaica**  
**30-31 May, 2017**

The Pan Caribbean Partnership Against HIV and AIDS (PANCAP), in collaboration with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), convened a Regional Parliamentarians Forum under the theme “What can Parliamentarians Do to end AIDS?” at the Pegasus Hotel, Kingston, Jamaica, 30-31 May, 2017. The aim of the Forum was to discuss the targets of the United Nations Political Declaration on Fast Tracking the response to HIV (2016), lay the foundations for increased engagement within and among national parliaments, identify constitutional challenges, suggest strategies that parliamentarians may adopt and advocate for the end of AIDS.

The Forum was **chaired** by Mr. Dereck Springer, Director of PANCAP assisted by Chairs of Sessions: Ms. Karin Santi and Ms. Suki Beaver, both of UNDP.

**Attendance**

In attendance were 48 parliamentarians representing both government and opposition, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, St Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago.

Also present were representatives of United Nations Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for HIV in the Caribbean, UN agencies (UNDP, UNAIDS, PAHO, UNFPA), PEPFAR Caribbean Regional Program, USAID Jamaica, CARICOM Secretariat, Parliamentarians for Global Action, OAS LGBT Core Group, Caribbean Vulnerable Communities Coalition (CVC), Caribbean Network of People Living with HIV and AIDS (CRN+), Caribbean Forum for Liberation and Acceptance of all Genders and Sexualities (CariFLAGS), Caribbean Sex Work Coalition (CSWC), The University of the West Indies, PANCAP Regional Coordinating Mechanism for Global Fund Projects, the National AIDS Commissions, Faith Leaders Regional Consultative Steering Committee for the Implementation of Recommendations to end AIDS by 2030, Youth, and other Civil Society partners.

A list of attendees and their designations is attached as an annex.

**The opening Ceremony which was web streamed included several speakers.**

**Mr. Dereck Springer** Director, PANCAP welcomed participants to the Forum and referred to the well-established platforms of the CARICOM system and PANCAP that facilitate collaboration among diverse countries. He also stated that PANCAP will use this Forum to build on the work already initiated with parliamentarians, documented in the Caribbean Regional Strategic Framework on HIV and AIDS 2014-2018, with priorities for prevention, treatment, reduction of AIDS related stigma and discrimination and sustainable financing.

**Mr. Winfield Tannis-Abbott**, Secretary, Caribbean Regional Network of People Living with HIV and AIDS (CRN+), noted that CRN, which was formed in 1996, aims to ensure that HIV is given a voice and a face. He indicated the context of the challenges to parliamentarians in providing leadership and sponsoring multi-sectoral rights based approaches to respond to the pandemic.

**Hon Nicolette Henry, Minister within the Ministry of Education, Department of Culture, Youth and Sport**, Guyana and Chair of PANCAP Regional Coordinating Mechanism, said that Parliamentarians bear a responsibility to take leadership and demonstrate the political will including challenging other stakeholders for taking action to end AIDS and to tackle the difficult problems of investing in sustainability of our HIV programs.

**Ms. Maura Barry Boyle, USAID Mission Director for Jamaica** pledged USA's continued support for marginalized groups through PEPFAR to combat the spread of HIV. It has invested US \$200M since 2002 in the Caribbean and is the largest contributor to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. She stated that the USA is proud to support the Caribbean in the efforts to break down barriers to stigma and discrimination.

**Dr. Douglas Slater Assistant Secretary General, Human and Social Development, CARICOM Secretariat**, referred to the genesis of PANCAP as a response to HIV and the role of St Kitts and Nevis Leadership, first under Former Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Dr. Denzil Douglas and now with the same fervor through the current Prime Minister, Hon. Timothy Harris and the Minister of Health Senator Hon. Wendy Phipps. He urged parliamentarians to do the right thing by fighting for the human rights and dignity for all.

**Dr. Elsie Laurence Chounoune, Deputy Resident Representative, UNDP, Jamaica** pointed to the important pledges by over 192 UN member states to the seventeen (17) 2030 SDGs which include actions to address stigma, discrimination and social exclusion that prevent key populations from accessing HIV and other health and social services. She also referred to the UNDP sponsored Commission on HIV and the Law: Risks, Rights and Health, which covered a range of recommendations to remove the legal barriers to HIV services and increase rights based programming. In addition to working in 88 countries to achieve these ends, UNDP is collaborating with CVC and COIN to reduce the spread and impact of HIV among key populations. She pointed to the World Council of Churches call to action to reduce stigma and discrimination which is in keeping with Pope Francis's reference to the scriptures that emphasize the need of the church to stay close to the poor

In his remarks **Hon. Mark Brantley Minister of Foreign Affairs St Kitts/Nevis and Minister of Health for Nevis, speaking on behalf of Prime Minister Timothy Harris, CARICOM Lead Head for Human Resources, Health and HIV** acknowledged the importance of the Forum. He viewed the event as an opportunity to tackle some major issues, deal with some uncomfortable truths, and arrive at positive recommendations for moving forward as a collective. The Foreign Minister posed questions, which he stated need frank answers at this Forum. Among them are: Why is it taking so long for countries to implement the PANCAP Model Anti-Discrimination Legislation recommended by the Legal Affairs Committee? What has to be done? Are our justice systems effectively dealing with fostering reforms and modifications to break down the barriers for key populations to access health services without fear of stigma and discrimination? Have our judicial systems and the courts in particular made adequate provision for coping with the special problems affecting cases involving violence against women, girls and children? He said “The questions that we need to pose and frankly answer at this Forum are: why is it taking so long for countries to implement the Model Legislation?”

**The Hon. Delroy Chuck Minister of Justice, Jamaica who gave the keynote address highlighted the fact that** the Jamaica Parliament is about to address the Sexual Offences and Child Abuse legislation. He stated that the region’s leaders have a profound charge to take steps to end the AIDS epidemic and gave the clarion call for leaders to get and stay involved. He indicated that AIDS has the capacity to destabilize geographic population groups, and must be treated as a multi-sectoral problem and not solely as a health problem. In this regard, the Minister pointed to his concern of the levels of institutional discrimination of the poor, women, and marginalized groups, including LGBTI.

Noting that some of churches are powerful influencers of public opinion, he implored parliamentarians to form alliances with faith leaders and be very clear on whether they are going to lead or are being led, whether they have the courage to be the leaders for a new tomorrow that is inclusive of all human beings. He called on Parliamentarians to break away from the herd mentality and advocate for human rights.

### **Synopsis of the plenary sessions**

In the First plenary session on “What is the Science Showing?”, Dr Anton Best, Senior Medical Officer, HIV/STI Programme, Ministry of Health, Barbados explained that he prefers to refer to immune deficiency caused by virus in the blood as the HIV disease rather than AIDS. He explained that until an HIV vaccine is discovered the treatment of the disease must be considered as a life

cycle approach providing an opportunity for targeting interventions at several points in the life cycle. In this regard, ART improves the immune system and reduces the risk of spreading the disease.

Dr. Best explained what is meant by treatment as prevention by illustrating the results from studies conducted between 2002-2011 showing an increased proportion of persons on ARVs who were virally suppressed and less newly detected cases in the OECS. He also illustrated from global trials such as the 2011 HPTN 025 ARV therapy which showed 96% efficacy and the 2015 START randomized trials with treatment right away and deferred treatment with significant results from starting immediately and double individual and public benefits. Other illustrations are in Pre exposure prophylaxis especially for those at risk and post exposure prophylaxis, which Barbados provides to health workers and victims of sexual assault, and not for casual sex, within 72 hours of exposure. He also identified the benefits of combination therapy

**In the second plenary session, Dr Carolyn Gomes focused on Stigma and Discrimination.** She made the comparison between stigma attached to leprosy and HIV respectively and concluded that positive results are achieved when treatment is integrated into health systems and stigma is reduced by promoting inclusion. She stated stigma and discrimination in the Caribbean is the second highest in the World. This is compounded by the fact that bad laws make vulnerable groups more vulnerable and LGBTI are excluded from family law of intestacy (inheritance).

**Ms Suki Beaver, presented on International and Regional Human Frameworks and recommended** the codification of human rights treaties as principles and standards affecting the lives of all especially duty bearers. She referred to the epidemic of bad laws but indicated that scientific tools are not sufficient to end AIDS as LGBTI people need to enjoy the same rights as others.

**Flagship PANCAP Initiatives, presented by Mr. Dereck Springer, Director, included the PANCAP Model Anti-Discrimination Law,** which was completed on the basis of widespread consultation among stakeholders and approved by the Legal Affairs Committee in 2012. He also referred to the Justice for All process, with fifteen (15) actionable recommendations, classified in short medium and long-term scenarios and the roll out involved engagements of separate stakeholder groups leading to Regional Fora of Caribbean Faith leaders in February 1-2, 2017, Caribbean Youth Leaders, National AIDS Programme Managers and now Parliamentarians. Each focused on what the respective stakeholder group could contribute toward ending AIDS and resulted in contracted recommendations.

**In the third plenary Tracy Robinson, Coordinator University Rights and Advocacy Project presented on the theme Recent Legal Developments in litigations in Belize, Guyana, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago.** This focused on involving constitutional and legal principles of human rights affecting LGBTI. **She used these to illustrate how litigation is counter-majoritarian in theory but can produce wide ranging issues. She recommended that**

**opportunities be grasped for taking incremental steps toward modification and/or abolition of bad/outdated laws.** These include reviewing colonial laws, accelerating judicial practices that focus on social justice, strengthening the participatory processes in law reform and the mechanisms outside the court such as the offices of the Ombudsman, which facilitate public access and oversight committees to ensure accountability and justice for all.

### **Interactive Sessions**

**Three interactive sessions included one that highlighted models for removing barriers to stigma and discrimination. Ms Karin Santi UNDP focused on Gender Based Violence (GBV) as a major barrier for MSM, SW Trans Women in health care, police and street and public setting. Ms. Suki Beavers, UNDP reviewing the role of Parliamentarians in the process of advocating for human rights and inclusion of LGBTI people focused on the International Human Rights Framework.** She also referred to the UNDP: LGBTI Inclusion Index with 5 Key priorities: economic, wellbeing, political, health and violence. She presented several models that demonstrated the value of a **bipartisan/multipartisan approach to legislative reforms designed to eliminate stigma and discrimination.**

The second involving Ms Monica Adame, Director Gender Equality and Population Program, Parliamentarians for Global Action, Ms Jennifer Walsh, PEPFAR Coordinator, Caribbean Region, and Ambassador Sylvian Fabi, High Commissioner of Canada in Jamaica focused on best practices in the Global arena. It highlighted tools that MPs **may use** to educate and sensitize societies, including decision-makers, about the problems affecting the rights of LGBTI people and the importance of their inclusion. These include a Handbook for Parliamentarians, creating safe spaces and opportunities for dialogue between parliamentarians and civil society activists, establishing and maintaining collaboration and communication with civil society representatives, strengthening coordination between Parliament, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and regional bodies, such as the Caribbean Community and the Organization of American States; and framing messages to emphasize the supremacy and centrality of human rights, which should be a non-negotiable priority, above and beyond party affiliation or religious and cultural considerations.

The third involved a Civil Society Panel moderated by Dr Cesar Nunez, Director, Latin America and Caribbean Region, UNAIDS and including Ms Miriam Edwards, Chair of the Caribbean Sex Work Coalition, Dr Carolyn Gomes, Executive Director, CVC and Mr Dane Lewis, Co-Chair of CariFLAGS.

Recommendations arising from the open discussion that followed the panel included greater inclusion of PLHIV, broader representation requiring strategies to deal with other groups: young men with sexually transmitted infections who spread HIV—health promotion “knowing status”, focusing on the underrepresented, such as the elderly and recognizing sex work as a profession.

### **Results from Parliamentarians Four (4) Working Group Sessions**

The working groups focused on what parliamentarians can contribute to ending AIDS by 2030, taking into consideration what the science is showing and the issues related to prevention, treatment, stigma and discrimination and requirements for sustainable financing. The results of the working groups' sessions were also to identify priorities for the representation, legislation and oversight.

The recommendations also included agreements to pursue actions with specific timelines through the legislative, representational and oversight roles of parliamentarians. In this regard, the Forum concluded with commitments for action including reviewing and implementing the PANCAP Model Anti-Discrimination Legislation, establishing a Regional Parliamentarian Action Group to function as a coordinating mechanism by July 2017 and an information and communications network to facilitate communications with and among National Parliamentary Committees starting Oct 2017. It also committed to make provision for a follow up regional consultation with special reference to knowledge sharing and accelerating the process toward ending AIDS in 2018.

### **Commitments Resulting from the Forum**

#### **Legislative Role**

- Establish Bipartisan Committee/Select Committee to document, categorise and establish strategy for implementation
  - Commission situational analysis of laws and policies to establish status of gaps and priorities [The University Rights Advocacy project (URAP) and the Caribbean Vulnerable Communities Coalition (CVC)]
- Establish standing Committees to advance implementation of priorities in collaboration with Stakeholders:
  - Schools with age appropriate (Health and Family Life Education)
  - FBOs on removing the barriers to stigma and discrimination
  - Youth on peer counselling for prevention

#### **Representational Role:**

- Be more proactive with reaching out to LGBTI, differently-abled and prisoners
- Core Group to educate and engage colleagues on the status of the science
- Sensitizing the public to get buy in and support for reducing stigma and discrimination
  - Target schools with age appropriate HFLE
- Solicit support of FBOs
- Draw on the expertise and outreach of National AIDS Commissions

- Embark on nonpartisan National Sensitization to create stronger awareness of issues
- Resuscitate Presidential-type Commissions for advocacy to foster political will
- Engage constituencies/different demographic groups in promotion of appropriate messaging

#### **Oversight: Budget/ Monitoring and Evaluation**

- Monitor Public institutions to ensure reduction of stigma and discrimination
- Utilize parliamentary Mechanisms such as Select and Accounts Committees to achieve targets and time lines noting differences in systems among countries (Suriname and Haiti have different systems from the rest of CARICOM) Committee etc.
- Parliament to request periodic reports and disseminate the results
- Establish periodic reviews of programs and budget

#### **Sustainability of the Process at Regional Level**

- Parliamentarian Forum to establish a Regional Parliamentarian Action Group to function as a coordinating mechanism [July 2017}
- PANCAP to Follow up with National Parliamentary Committees [October 2017-September 2019}
- PANCAP to establish an Information and Communication Network to facilitate communications with and among National Parliamentary Committees [Oct 2017 – Sept 2019]
- PANCAP to formulate a template for recording developments on targets based on national Priorities [ July, 2017- 2019]
- PANCAP to coordinate a follow up Regional Consultation with special reference to knowledge sharing [2018]
- PANCAP to establish a monitoring and evaluation template by which to establish to progress of countries towards achieving the goals for ending AIDS by 2030