

## Civil Society Hearing on AIDS at the United Nations

Yesterday, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly held an informal interactive hearing with representatives of civil society as part of the preparatory process for the High-level meeting on HIV/AIDS. Since the start of the AIDS epidemic, civil society, shorthand for 'all of civil society, including key populations, women and girls, people living with HIV, as well as community-based organizations and nongovernmental organizations', has been at the forefront of the response to HIV —demanding access to treatment and HIV services, calling for the respect of human rights and supporting community-led HIV services.

Civil society representatives from around the world spoke to UN Member States about major issues in the AIDS response, including the need for increased financing, leaving no one behind, integration, innovation, and partnering between governments, the private sector and communities.

Panelists highlighted that community organizations were facing severe financial challenges and many are closing their doors. In a recent article entitled "Investing in community advocacy and services to end the AIDS epidemic" reports indicated that a total of 40% of organizations responding to a recent UNAIDS survey reported that their funding had decreased since 2013. Two thirds expected flat or reduced funding in the future. The decline in funding is resulting in a decline in community services—89% of those who reported a decrease in funding also reported they had to scale down their services as a result. Greater investment in civil society and community-based service delivery is critical to the Fast-Track approach. At today's panel, Michel Sidibe, UNAIDS Executive Director, stated that without 26 billion in funds, the rights of healthcare and security cannot be met.

Panelists also discussed the need for advocacy and the community efforts which have proven critical in overcoming many of the major challenges in the AIDS response, including reaching people most affected by HIV with life-changing HIV services, providing support for adherence to treatment and other essential health services.

Community advocacy and services are crucial to ending the AIDS epidemic. Here at God's Love, one of our commitments is to ensure and expand access to food and nutrition programs for people living with HIV/AIDS through the Ryan White Treatment and Modernization Act (RW). It is because of advocates that Ryan White exists. God's Love was the recipient of the one of the first RW Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) grants in 1992. Then in 2009 – when reauthorization wanted to strip RW of FNS, advocates from around the country banded together and went beyond restoration to make FNS a core medical service. We urge that funding for medically appropriate FNS be expanded in the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program. FNS play a critical role in ensuring that PWH engage in primary medical care, maintain their care, adhere to their medications, avoid costly institutional admissions/readmissions, and ultimately achieve viral suppression. We hope that this crucial service will feature at the upcoming

United Nations High Level Meeting on Ending AIDS which will take place from June 8 to 10 at the UN headquarters in New York.

**For more information or to watch the latest videos published on UN Web TV please visit <http://webtv.un.org/search?term=2016-04-05>**