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UN working to ensure release of gay men jailed in Senegal

Stressing that homophobia has no place in the response to the AIDS epidemic, the United Nations today deplored the jailing of nine gay men who were members of a group working to provide condoms and HIV treatment in Senegal, and said it is working with a coalition of partners to ensure their release.

The men, who were arrested in mid-December, were sentenced by a Senegalese court for acts against nature and the creation of an association of criminals. Their case is currently on appeal.

"There is no place for homophobia. Universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support must be accessible to all people in Senegal who are in need—including men who have sex with men," said Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS ([UNAIDS](#)).

"This will only happen if the men convicted are released and steps taken to rebuild trust with affected communities," he added.

UNAIDS has teamed up with civil society organizations, the public sector and partners such as the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the French Embassy and the Swedish Embassy representing the European Union, to ensure the release of the detainees, all of whom work for an association called AIDES Senegal.

The agency added that homophobia and criminalization of consensual adult sexual behaviour represent major barriers to effective responses to HIV.

"Such responses depend on the protection of the dignity and rights of all those affected by HIV, including their right and ability to organize and educate their communities, advocate on their behalf, and access HIV prevention and treatment services," it said in a statement.

In addition to taking the necessary steps for the release of the nine men, UNAIDS urges the Government to undertake efforts to eliminate stigma and discrimination faced by men who have sex with men and create an enabling legal environment for them and the organizations working with them so as to protect their rights and increase access for HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services.

Calling for the creation of a social and legal environment that guarantees respect for human rights, the agency recommends that "criminal law prohibiting sexual acts between consenting adults in private should be reviewed with the aim of repeal."

Just days before the arrests took place, UN human rights chief Navi Pillay had lamented the fact that there are still too many countries that criminalize sexual relations

between consenting adults of the same sex and that some 10 States still have laws making homosexual activity punishable by death.

"No human being should be denied their human rights simply because of their perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. No human being should be subject to discrimination, violence, criminal sanctions or abuse simply because of their perceived sexual orientation or gender identity," she said in a message to a discussion on human rights, sexual orientation and gender identity, held at UN Headquarters in New York.

"Those who are lesbian, gay or bisexual, those who are transgender, transsexual or intersex, are full and equal members of the human family and are entitled to be treated as such," she stressed.
