



## The Global Coalition on Women and AIDS

### Statement on International Women's Day 2012

On International Women's Day 2012 the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS (GCWA), calls on its members, as well as all United Nations agencies, governments and donors to intensify efforts to engage and empower girls and young women living with and affected by HIV.

This is urgent because:

- Every minute a young woman, between the ages of 15 to 24 becomes infected with HIV <sup>1</sup>.
- Globally, young women aged 15-24, are most vulnerable to HIV with infection rates twice as high as in young men.<sup>2</sup>
- HIV is the leading cause of death of women of reproductive age.

Women and girls often face barriers in accessing HIV prevention, treatment and care services as well as sexual and reproductive health services due to factors such as lack of status and limited decision-making power, lack of control over financial resources and restricted mobility.<sup>3</sup>

Girls and young women can also face age-related barriers, such as parental consent laws or policies, which impede their access to HIV and sexual and reproductive health services and comprehensive sexuality education. Over the next ten years, more than 100 million girls in developing countries are expected to be married before their 18th birthday – mostly to older men and often against their will.

Girls and young women living with HIV also can be faced with stigma and discrimination—from their peers, families, health workers and communities. Key affected groups of women, such as women engaged in sex work and using drugs, can experience disproportionate levels of stigma and discrimination. This makes women who are engaged in sex work and/or use drugs less likely to access HIV prevention and treatment services as well as general health services.<sup>4</sup> HIV has left thousands of girls caring for their younger brothers and sisters after the death of their parents. The missed educational opportunities and inherent poverty further adds to their vulnerability to HIV, as well as unintended pregnancy.

All women and girls require greater efforts to secure their human rights. We need to work together to:

1. **Enable girls and women, in all their diversity, to protect themselves from HIV infection, and live their full potential, free of stigma and discrimination, sexual violence, coercion and abuse.**
2. **Promote sexual and reproductive health and rights of girls and young women, and ensure their access to comprehensive HIV and sexual and reproductive health services.**
3. **Enable girls and young women access to comprehensive sexuality education and information.**

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<sup>1</sup> UNAIDS, World AIDS Day 2012.

<sup>2</sup> UNAIDS, World AIDS Day 2012.

<sup>3</sup> WHO, Gender Inequalities and Health. Accessed on 24/02/2012 at [http://www.who.int/gender/hiv\\_aids/en/](http://www.who.int/gender/hiv_aids/en/)

<sup>4</sup> The Global Coalition on Women and AIDS (2011) 'HIV, harm reduction and the sexual and reproductive health needs of women who use drugs'

4. **Advance and support the realization of all human rights of girls and young women.**

Today on International Women's Day, our commitment to girls and young women living with and affected by HIV is stronger than ever. By building and strengthening partnerships, and jointly advocating for the rights and needs of girls and young women. By mobilizing and empowering girls and young women living with and affected by HIV, we can help turn the tide of HIV and inspire them to determine the future they want.