Dear Dr. Havlir and Dr. Katabira,

The Global Coalition on Women and AIDS, a worldwide alliance of civil society groups, networks of women living with HIV, women’s organizations, AIDS service organizations, and the United Nations system, welcomes the theme of the forthcoming conference *Turning the Tide Together*, with its strong focus on ending the HIV epidemic. We would like to congratulate the conference coordinating committee on its hard work in shaping the agenda and in particular its expressed commitment to full participation and outreach to civil society and community groups.

However, we note with concern that the announced list of plenary speakers does not include a woman living with HIV. This lack of representation risks undermining the spirit and the power of the conference and its theme.

Epidemiological data tells us that the HIV response needs to focus much more on the needs of women, especially young women and girls. Women account for over half of all people living with HIV, and in four regions the numbers of women living with HIV have more than doubled between 2001 and 2009. Moreover, globally, young women, aged 15-24, are particularly vulnerable to HIV, accounting for 26% of all new HIV infections. This points not only to a challenge but also an opportunity for having more impact on the HIV epidemic. In this time of financial austerity when we are challenged for resources for the HIV response, we must use all political platforms to highlight that investing in women and girls is essential for achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

The International AIDS Conference is a critical opportunity to maintain women’s leadership at the global level for an effective HIV response. Therefore we call on the conference coordinating committee to ensure the inclusion of women openly living with HIV as speakers for more impactful plenary sessions, which speak directly for and to women and girls living with and affected by HIV.

We know that successful responses to HIV have been largely built upon leadership from most affected and marginalized communities, including women living with HIV, sex workers, women who use injecting drugs, women of colour, young women, etc. It is for this reason that the Global Coalition has supported young women living with HIV to become champions in their communities for HIV and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights. The Global Coalition on Women and AIDS, through our partnerships with networks of women living with HIV and the women’s rights movement, would be most happy to assist in identifying suitable speakers, if so required.

We trust that you will look favorably upon this request and thank you in advance for your solidarity with women living with HIV, in all their diversity, around the world.

The Global Coalition on Women and AIDS