



JOINT STATEMENT FOR WORLD AIDS DAY

**In the Philippines and beyond, the war on drugs fuels the HIV epidemic.
Let's end it.**

1 December 2017

Today, on [World AIDS Day](#), we call on governments, communities and families to stand with people living with HIV. Taking this stand means acting to protect the dignity and value of every life. This means not attacking nor marginalising people in situations of vulnerability; including gay men and other men who have sex with men, sex workers, transgender people and people who inject drugs. It also means ending the war on drugs, which continues to rage in many parts of the world.

This war on drugs is waged with notorious brutality in the Philippines. [More than 12,000 people are estimated to have been killed by police and vigilantes in the 16 months since Rodrigo Duterte became President](#). They were killed because of alleged drug use or dealing, but the circumstances of these executions [remain obscured by generalised impunity](#). Thousands more have been forced to surrender themselves to authorities after being arbitrarily listed as suspects, many of whom are now locked up in inhumane, over-crowded prisons and detention facilities. The threat of mandatory drug testing of students, reinstating the death penalty for drug offences, and reducing the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 15 to 9 still hangs over the country.

On the weekend just passed, Philippines Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) officers, accompanied by a camera crew, raided a hotel room and arrested [11 men alleged to be engaged in group sex and drug use](#). The 'mug shots' of all men as well as their names, professions and age were released by the PDEA and widely reported in the media. The fact that one of them was living with HIV was also disclosed, contravening national and international norms, and fuelling virulent attacks on social media.

The drug war continues to normalise stigmatisation and violence against vulnerable groups, subjecting people living with HIV to indignity and fear, and fuelling HIV transmissions. Indeed, the number of people diagnosed with HIV has risen dramatically in the last 10 years, from 1 person a day in 2008, to 31 in 2017.

A person's sexual orientation, private life, and HIV status must not be exploited for media sensationalism and political gain. People who use drugs should not be treated as criminals. The HIV epidemic will only subside if the dignity and value of every life is respected and protected. For this to be realised, [UNAIDS recommends that governments:](#)

- remove punitive laws against vulnerable populations such as men who have sex with men and people who use drugs
- decriminalise drug use and sex work, and
- take a public health and harm reduction approach to drug use.

It is time to leave behind harmful politics, ideology and prejudice; and prioritise the health and welfare of affected populations, their families and communities. [#SupportDontPunish](#).