

Zero Discrimination Day Message

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1 March 2016

The call to zero discrimination is one that is very close to my heart.

A world where everyone is free to be who they are and to love who they choose is a wonderful and precious aspiration.

At its core the zero discrimination message means accepting and valuing diversity in society; dismantling legal and social barriers that block access to services and opportunities; and challenging attitudes that belittle, exclude or marginalize individuals or groups of people based on their perceived difference from the “rest of us”.

In reality, there is no them and us – just people. It is a basic human right for everyone to be who they are free from the fear of stigma and discrimination.

Stigma and discrimination wreck lives and drive people to the fringes of society. At their worst, they kill people by impeding their access to essential information and services.

As the champion for the UNAIDS 90-90-90 Fast-Track Treatment target, I know that zero discrimination makes sense in terms of public health policy too. Because as well as being a basic human right for everyone, non-discrimination is intrinsic to achieving healthier and fairer societies for all of us.

In health settings for example, we need to create environments where people are unafraid to test for HIV and to seek treatment if need be. This is critical to reaching the UNAIDS 90-90-90 Fast-Track Treatment target by 2020, which would put the world on course to ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030.

Over the last 30 years, we know that countries taking action to reduce stigma and discrimination in health care and across wider society have made the greatest progress in diminishing the impact of HIV. This lesson has to be applied everywhere and with particular urgency among people and in places most affected by the virus.

Wherever they live, people who currently have problems accessing services – for example sex workers, people who inject drugs, transgender people, people living with disabilities, gay men and other men who have sex with men, young women – need to be listened to, brought in from the cold and empowered to take decisions about their own lives, health and wellbeing.

They must take their rightful place in society. Societies that are inclusive are happier, healthier and wealthier.

We may not yet have achieved a world of zero discrimination but the message is more vital than ever.

Please support Zero Discrimination Day.