Civil Society Hearing in advance of the High-Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS, 6 April 2016

EriKa Castellanos - Speech at the panel "Financing the AIDS Response and the Cost of Inaction"

Civil society has always been in the forefront of the HIV response. Generations of activists demanded global investment in HIV, research, innovative prevention strategies and treatment. With the advent of antiretroviral treatment and the scientific developments we can say we have achieved much.

But we must not get too comfortable. Ending the epidemic today is not only a biomedical and financial challenge, but it is also a social, a political and human rights issue.

As one of the answers to the epidemic our generation saw the birth of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. The Global Fund has saved numerous lives and has brought hope to people who without the existence of such platforms would not benefit from health and social programs. Such is the case of key populations, the work that is supported through the Global Fund with transgender women and sex workers, for example, has opened the discussions of human rights for us. Today, amidst a replenishment year and with challenging global financial atmosphere, there is the risk that local NGOs might close doors as often the only funding they receive proceeds from international donors. Civil society applauds the call from UNAIDS to increase the investment in funding civil society organizations and key populations.

Although new HIV infections have declined there are still a totally unacceptable number of new infections yearly. In 2014, 2 million people were newly infected with HIV and 1.2 million died of AIDS related deaths - 1.2 million preventable unnecessary deaths.
Is ending AIDS by 2030 a catchy phrase that is politically correct; one we like to repeat in our speeches and country reports to get the applause of our constituencies? Or are we going to make a STOP and look at our achievements, learn from the history of our epidemic and take the necessary steps to REALLY end AIDS by 2030. Do we want to decrease or maintain the current investment and continue doing so forever? Or do we want to fast track the response, increase investment and upscale treatment and prevention services TODAY in order to enjoy an AIDS free generation in the near future?

We need to invest and we need to do so in the right things, in the right places and for the right people and do so in the right way! Increasing the investment in key populations, in civil society and community led interventions.

A warning: financing should not form the basis of oppression, as the majority decides the distribution of resources at the expense and health of the marginalized in prevention and treatment. Financing should reflect the visibility of key population’s presence and needs in negotiations, in policy reviews of national responses. It should reflect community needs that usually intersect with justice concerns. Human rights should not be thrown under the bus for political expedience and it should include examination of how fundamental rights are applied in policy or impacted by state system complicity in ignoring their own responsibility to ALL citizens in health policy decisions.

I make a call to member states to do the right thing! For the millions of us that live with HIV, for the millions of HIV infections that can be averted and millions of unnecessary AIDS related deaths that can be prevented. ACT NOW, commit now with a strong political declaration and INVEST now to end aids by 2030.