



HIV/AIDS, Gender, and Global and International Commitments

The complex relationship between gender, health, development, and socio-economic status means that gender, and women and men's vulnerabilities to HIV/AIDS must be addressed as cross-cutting issues, not only through the health sector but also through education, the media, and public policy. Although not every United Nations convention, declaration, or programme of action specifically addresses the issues of gender inequity and HIV/AIDS, nearly all of them address some aspect of health, human rights, or women's rights; and all are inextricably related. Listed here in reverse chronology are the United Nations declarations and programmes of action which deal specifically with gender, or gender and HIV/AIDS. Each document is different, and carries with it different legal and policy implications for United Nations Member States.

Collectively, the documents address such diverse issues as:

- GENDER - gender stereotypes; gender-based violence; male involvement; women's empowerment; sexual exploitation; gender mainstreaming.
- HIV/AIDS - vulnerability to transmission; HIV testing and counselling; sexual and reproductive health services; treatment; access to and development of barrier methods, drugs and other therapies; people living with HIV/AIDS; behaviour change; prevention strategies; access to information and education; caregiving; mother-to-child transmission; discrimination and stigma; sexuality education.
- POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CLIMATE - socio-economic status and poverty; age; ethnicity; political commitments; the economic impact of HIV; emergency and conflict situations; refugee and internally displaced populations; international humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping; policy and decision-making; laws and traditional practices; information and data collection and analysis.

Taken together, these documents represent a comprehensive and powerful articulation of commitment by Member States to addressing and eliminating gender inequity and HIV/AIDS, a commitment which must be honoured and fulfilled. It is essential for policy makers and those seeking to engage in policy advocacy to understand the international and national legal frameworks within which their interventions are structured. The links below provide access to the full text of each of the documents:

UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on HIV/AIDS Declaration of Commitment

Date: 2001

Who made the commitment: Heads of State of UN Member Countries.

Website: www.unaids.org/UNGASS/index.html

By far the most comprehensive effort to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the Declaration of Commitment from the UNGASS sets out a number of policy and programmatic resolutions and recommendations – many of which address both gender and women's vulnerability.

Article 14 of the Declaration stresses "...that gender equality and the empowerment of women are fundamental elements in the reduction of the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV/AIDS".

This and other articles (see articles 4, 6, 23, 37, 47, 53, 54, 59-62, 68, 75, 78, and 94) carry with them significant gender-based implications for policies and programmes which attempt to address this global crisis.

Millennium Declaration and Development Goals

Date: 2000

Who made the commitment: Heads of State of UN Member Countries.

Website: www.un.org/millenniumgoals/index.html

Millennium Development Goal # 3 - Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women Target - Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015.



Millennium Development Goal # 6 - Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other Diseases
Target - Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS.

The Millennium Declaration also commits states to “promot[ing] gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable”.

On more than one occasion (for example, International Women’s Day), Secretary General Kofi Annan has stated that Goal #3 is essential for the achievement of all the Millennium Development Goals (www.un.org/events/women/iwd/2003/sgmessage.html).

World Education Forum

Date: 2000

Who made the commitment: Governments, Organization, Agencies and Groups in Attendance.

Website: www.unesco.org/education/efa/wef_2000/index.shtml

In Article 7, Paragraph ii of the Dakar Programme for Action, the participants in the forum made a commitment to ensure “...that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality”.

In Article 8, Paragraph vii, participants further committed to “implement as a matter of urgency education programmes and actions to combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic”.

Fourth World Conference on Women (“Beijing”) Declaration and Platform for Action

Date: 1995

Who made the commitment: State representatives who attended the conference. The declaration and platform were subsequently endorsed by UN Member States during a General Assembly.

Website: www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/

Strategic objective C.3 - Undertake gender-sensitive initiatives that address sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, and sexual and reproductive health issues.

The Beijing Platform for Action, through Strategic Objective C3, addresses the issue of Gender and HIV/AIDS quite comprehensively, setting out 16 “Actions to be Taken” in order to increase the gender-sensitivity of programmes and projects which address HIV/AIDS.

Beijing +5 (2000) - www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/beijing+5.htm

Article 3 of the Beijing +5 Outcome Document re-states the importance of integrating a gender perspective into the HIV/AIDS response, highlights continuing problems relating to the epidemic, and recommends solutions for states and the international community.

International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action

Date: 1994

Who made the commitment: State representatives who attended the conference. The programme was subsequently endorsed by UN Member States during a General Assembly.

Website: www.unfpa.org/icpd/icpd.htm

In Article C of Chapter 7 (on Reproductive Rights and Reproductive Health), the ICPD Programme of Action addresses sexually transmitted diseases and the prevention of HIV from the perspective of women’s vulnerability to the epidemic, setting out key recommendations for addressing HIV through reproductive health services.

In article E on Adolescents, the Programme sets out how governments and civil society can work to meet the distinct HIV-prevention needs of adolescents.



ICPD +5 (1999) - www.unfpa.org/icpd5/icpd5.htm

World Conference on Human Rights Declaration and Programme of Action (“Vienna Declaration”)

Date: 1993

Who made the commitment: UN Member States.

Website: www.unhchr.ch/html/menu5/wchr.htm

Though the Declaration does not mention either gender equity or HIV/AIDS specifically, it “...recognizes the importance of the enjoyment by women of the highest standard of physical and mental health throughout their life span” (Article 41), and makes several other significant statements relating to women’s human rights and violence against women.

Vienna +5 (1998) - www.unhchr.ch/html/50th/vdparev.htm

Convention on the Rights of the Child

Date: 1989

Who made the commitment: UN Member States.

Website: www.unicef.org/crc/

Though the Convention does not mention either gender equity or HIV/AIDS specifically, it recognizes “...the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health”. Furthermore, it commits States Parties to ensuring “...that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services” (Article 24).

In particular, Section 2(f) of Article 24 commits States Parties to developing “...preventive health care, guidance for parents and family planning education and services”, which has broad-reaching implications for the issue of HIV/AIDS.

Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

Date: 1979

Who made the commitment: UN Member States.

Website: www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/conven.htm

Though the Convention does not mention either gender equity or HIV/AIDS specifically, Article 12 of the Convention commits States Parties to “...take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of health care in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, access to health care services, including those related to family planning”. Article 12 is also being used by a number of countries to call for HIV/AIDS prevention and care services.

The CEDAW Committee has also released a set of General Recommendations on HIV/AIDS (1990)

Website: www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recomm.htm

