

ALGIERS PLATFORM OF ACTION ON HIV/AIDS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE WORLD OF WORK IN MENA REGION

I. PREAMBLE

“AIDS has a profound impact on workers and their families, enterprises and national economies . It is a workplace issue and a development challenge.” (Juan Somavia, ILO Director-General, June 2001).

Therefore ILO became a co-sponsor of UNAIDS in October 2001 in order to join with other UN agencies in the priority fight against HIV/AIDS.

The HIV/AIDS is expanding across the globe threatening human and social development in the world today. 60 million people have been infected so far and AIDS has killed over 20 million people. While 42 million people were living with HIV/AIDS in 2002, the number of infection is increasing, in particular in the developing world. During 20 years of struggle, it has become clear that this pandemic is destroying the development gains achieved in the developing world over the past half century.

In Middle East and North Africa the visible trend is towards increasing HIV infection rates, though still low in most of the countries. UNAIDS/WHO estimate that approximately 83,000 new infection occurred in 2002 and about 0.3 % of the region’s adults were infected. There is a diversity of the epidemic across the region, with higher HIV prevalence in specific sub-population and certain sub-regions most affected. Sexual contacts remain the mode of transmission but many countries are experiencing outbreaks among injecting drug users. Young people as well as women are a concern given the tendency towards an increasing proportion of cases being reported in these segments of the population.

While these figures are lower compared to Sub Saharan Africa and other regions of the world, low prevalence does not equate to low risks. The preconditions necessary for an HIV/AIDS epidemic do exist in several countries. Changing of behavior patterns of young people, socio-economic disparities, conflicts and emergency situations, high level of population mobility, including labor migrants, high female illiteracy rate and weak health systems, are contributing factors to the epidemic. Extensive mobility in search of livelihood and opportunities in and beyond the region, render migrant labors vulnerable to contracting HIV infections. Continued denial, stigma and discrimination around HIV/AIDS hinder efforts to avert the spread of the epidemic.

As the global commitment grows to confront the relentless progression of HIV/AIDS in the world, there is urgent need to step-up concerted efforts to confront HIV/AIDS in region.

Generating a society-wide response to this epidemic through a multi-sectoral commitment is the optimum method of defense. HIV/AIDS does not only affect the health of a nation, but also cripples its economy and the very fabric of its social entity. So far, it is estimated globally that 26 million workers aged 15-49 years old are living with HIV/AIDS. As such, the workplace present an important platform for averting the spread of HIV/AIDS, fighting stigma and discrimination and providing care and support to people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS.

The government, employers' and workers' organizations, and NGOs, have a critical role to play towards establishing HIV/AIDS policies in the workplace. All social partners and the civil society should pay particular attention to include equal rights to migrant workers, women, young people and other risk groups in the polices they formulate.

II. COMMON VALUES

It was agreed that the following would form a set of overall principles, which should guide the formulation of policies and programmes:

1. Tripartism, allied with civil society, NGOs and other stakeholders
2. Ensure social justice towards People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA)
3. A sense of shared responsibility among all actors
4. Good governance, transparency and accountability for results
5. Partnerships among international and national agencies to complement one another on the basis of comparative advantage

III. GOALS

The goals include fighting the culture of silence and denial, promoting prevention, advocacy, non discrimination, ensuring care and support for people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS.

IV. ACTIONS

In order to achieve these goals, action should be backed by strong political, traditional and community leadership and religious clerics. Commitment in MENA region should focus on:

1. fighting the culture of silence and denial ;
2. raising national awareness of the incidence and impact of the pandemic through, among other things, information, education and communication, using the ILO Code of Practice and its accompanying education and training manual as tools for action;
3. eliminating the stigma and discrimination attached to HIV/AIDS by implementing the ILO Code of Practice and adapting the relevant ILO labor standards and national labor legislation ;

4. documenting and disseminating information and statistical data through effective labor market information systems ;
5. strengthening the capacity of the social partners to address the pandemic ;
6. empowering women economically, socially and politically in order to reduce their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS ;
7. promoting gender equality, Arab and local cultures, religious and good practices that could be used for the purpose of preventing HIV/AIDS
8. integration HIV/AIDS in existing social security schemes and developing new ones to ensure coverage for all ;
9. building capacity of the cooperative organizations to address the problem of HIV/AIDS and integrate it to the respective workplace action programmes ;
10. development and inclusion of world of work component in the national strategic plan on HIV/AIDS;
11. incorporating HIV/AIDS consideration into the national development agenda and budget allocation ;
12. creating a rapid response mechanism to mitigate against the implications of the pandemic ;
13. promoting income and employment opportunities for PLWHA and their families through, for example, informal economy and micro enterprise development ;
14. promoting healthy work environment and strengthening occupational safety and health systems to protect groups at work
15. formulating and implementing social and labor policies and programmes that mitigate the effect of HIV/AIDS ;
16. formulating and implementing policies and programmes that mitigate the effect of HIV/AIDS specifically for migrant workers and other vulnerable groups;
17. effectively mobilizing resources ;
18. improving availability and affordability of drugs including antiretroviral drugs (ARV);
19. incorporating HIV/AIDS in collective bargaining agreements;

20. Urge governments and parliamentary institutions to include or amend national legislation to take cognizance of HIV/AIDS pandemic.

V. PARTNERSHIPS

In order to mount an effective response to the HIV/AIDS crisis and address its many-faceted implications, national level partnerships should be built rapidly among all the key actors: government, employers' and workers' organizations, NGOs and other civil society groups, including religious and traditional leaders. Partnerships should also be forged among and with bilateral and multilateral agencies, as well as regional organizations and UN agencies through - among others - joint planning, collection, dissemination and exchange of information on good practice and ensuring synergy in programmes.

VI. MONITORING/ FOLLOW UP:

The parties are committed to monitoring and following up this Platform of Action.

VII. THE ROLE OF THE ILO

The ILO should strengthen its activities in fighting HIV/AIDS in the Region through improved knowledge, vigorous advocacy, and expanded services. The ILO tripartite structure provides a unique mechanism for intensifying the response to HIV/AIDS. Therefore the ILO is requested to:

- assist in the implementation of the ILO Code of Practice and this Platform for Action.
- assist in the formulation of procedures to follow up on the commitments made in this Platform for Action.
- provide assistance to regional and national tripartite committees designated or set up under this Platform for Action.
- make the ILO Code of Practice and the education and training manuals and other relevant ILO HIV/AIDS instruments accessible to all MENA region.

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