

“200 Forum”

Text of video speech delivered by Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)

My friends, it is a great pleasure to address you today. I am humbled by the support the MSM and transgender community has given me.

First, I would like to congratulate you all on the major victory in India. The Delhi High court has restored dignity to men who have sex with men. I urge other countries to act in the same way. There is no place for homophobia anywhere in the world.

The goal of reducing HIV transmission from 200 each day to zero among MSM and transgender in Asia-Pacific is bold and courageous. This can be achieved if we remove the laws that criminalize same sex behaviour.

The laws are the first step, but we must also remove stigma and discrimination. As my friend Justice Edwin Cameron has said, “Admittance of gays and lesbians is the ultimate measure of a society’s capacity to view humanity in its fullness”.

HIV prevalence among MSM and transgender is over 25% in some places in the Asia-Pacific region. But access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support is still very low. This is unacceptable.

As I lead UNAIDS I ask myself: are we making a difference in the lives of the people that we serve? I challenge APCOM and its members to ask yourselves the same question – are you making a difference in the lives of men who have sex with men and transgender people? Have you contributed to stopping new HIV infections and increasing access to treatment among your brothers and sisters? Are you their voice when they cannot be heard?

To do that, UNAIDS and APCOM will stand shoulder to shoulder, in solidarity, with the MSM and transgender community to restore their dignity and bring hope to their lives.

Let me conclude, dear friends, with a quote from our UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon: “There will be no equitable progress so long as some parts of the population are marginalized and denied basic health and human rights – such as people living with HIV, sex workers, injecting drug users, and men who have sex with men.”

My very best wishes for your conference, and see you soon.

Thank you very much.