



THE PCB NGO DELEGATION'S COMMUNIQUÉ VIRTUAL 48TH UNAIDS PROGRAMME COORDINATING BOARD (PCB) MEETING



JUNE 29 - JULY 2, 2021

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Chapeau

Alexander Pastoors, Europe Delegate

The 48th UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board (PCB)¹ meeting, held between June 29 and July 2, was the fourth virtual PCB meeting (including the March 2021 2-day Special Session) due to the ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 crisis. The June PCB meeting focuses traditionally on internal housekeeping, with the bulk of the agenda filled with oversight reports on performance of the Joint Programme and management, as well as financial statements. This time, there were also other important topics, such as the zero draft of the next Unified Budget Results and Accountability Framework (UBRAF). This was timed right after the High Level Meeting on HIV and AIDS held last June 8-10 at the UN Headquarters in New York City.



The meeting was chaired by Namibia, using the Zoom platform with interpretation available in the six official UN languages. Given the experience with previous virtual meetings, the 48th PCB meeting was also reduced to three half-days followed by an additional day for the Thematic Segment. It was preceded by four themed pre-meetings between June 15 to 22, with an additional day to consult and discuss all decision points on the 25th of June, as well as virtual drafting rooms held on June 30 and July 1.

The virtual PCB meeting format continued to provide challenges and present inequities to participation, particularly for the NGO Delegation and CS observers. This proved to be ever so difficult in a changing political climate where, in the

¹ Documents related to the 48th PCB Meeting may be found at <https://www.unaids.org/en/whoweare/pcb/48>

absence of face-to-face lobbying and consultations with delegations of Member states, finding consensus became almost impossible. The trend of trying to erase key and vulnerable populations and scientific evidence from being mentioned in official documents started last March during the negotiations for decision points accompanying the adoption of the new Global AIDS Strategy and was propelled to an unprecedented level of diplomatic sabotage by Member States with autocratic regimes. The unsuccessful adoption of the report from the March special session on the first day of the meeting proved to be a prelude for the rest of the PCB meeting, where these diplomatic acts of sabotage like those displayed during the HLM were continued. On the last day of the meeting, for the first time in the history of the Joint Programme, the members of the PCB had to vote to adopt the report of the previous meeting of the PCB.

We find it extremely troublesome to see a technical forum such as the PCB being subjected to political games that in the end hurt and marginalize the very people that UNAIDS needs to serve the most. As the communities most affected by the HIV epidemic, we will remain vigilant as ever.

Agenda 1.3: Report of the Executive Director

Dr. Karen Badalyan, Europe Delegate



In her report to the 48th PCB meeting, UNAIDS Executive Director Winnie Byanyima mentioned the profound impact of COVID-19 on each of the HIV/AIDS priority areas. Winnie's report is an urgent call to action to tackle the acute and intersecting inequalities that are obstructing progress and to put communities at the forefront of the HIV response. She also emphasized the changes across laws, policies, social norms, and services that are required to get us back on track to reach the end of AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.

In previous PCB meetings, the PCB NGO Delegation raised the importance of granular and real-time data collection and analysis to improve the efficiency and impact of health system responses. In our [intervention](#), we also mentioned that the effective and sustained political will is vital to the success of HIV/AIDS responses. In this report, Winnie mentioned efforts to ensure that no one is being left behind by strengthening the gathering of granular data, including subnational estimates in more countries.

Small but important steps are also being done towards inclusion of non-binary and more gender-sensitive approaches in UNAIDS work, e.g., in indicators development, intervention targeting, and reporting. The PCB NGO Delegation appreciates the ED report for mentioning such approaches and philosophy in UNAIDS overall vision.

Agenda 1.4: Report by the Chair of the CCO

Jonathan Gunthorp, Africa Delegate

Discussion around the CCO report acknowledged the 25-year contribution of Cosponsors to the Joint Programme, but perhaps did not engage critically enough in the weaknesses or failures of this period. The collective UN inability to win fundamentally needed services and rights for key communities in many regions of the globe needs as much reflection and attention as the substantial victories that have been won. It particularly needs that reflection now as a sizable minority of Member States



channel significant resources into pushing back rights won, and denying in multilateral forums that key populations need rights, or services, or that they even exist. The confluence of a new Global AIDS Strategy, the 2021 Political Declaration of the HLM, and the concerted effort of a furious few Member States to bring a new cold war into the UN system, almost certainly means a new era in the global response that will require new tactics by all players, but in particular, careful strategizing of Cosponsors. Civil society will look to see smarter funding, bolder tactics, and braver advocacy for rights by Cosponsors at country levels.

On a different note, given the rising diversity and role of people on the move in the global HIV response, the NGO Delegation introduced the need to consider lobbying the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to apply as UNAIDS Cosponsor.

Agenda 3: Organizational Oversight Reports

Alexander Pastoors, Europe Delegate



Under agenda item 3, there were three organizational oversight reports presented and discussed. The reports from the internal and external auditors are standing items which are brought to the attention at every June PCB meeting. In addition to these reports, the first report from the ethics office was discussed, as requested by the PCB on its 45th meeting.

Although the reports from the external and internal auditors focus primarily on financial parameters of UNAIDS, both reports highlighted concerns with regards to low levels of trust between staff and senior management. This was reiterated in the first report from the ethics office.

The NGO Delegation acknowledged the fact that despite low levels of trust within the Secretariat, there were also substantial steps taken in transforming the organization into a workplace free of harassment and abuse of power. But cultural changes take time.

The NGO Delegation urged senior management to take the outcomes of the global staff survey as well as the survey of the UNAIDS Secretariat Staff Association seriously and to redouble the efforts to make UNAIDS a safe workplace for all of its staff in all their diversity.

Agenda item 4: Unified Budget, Results and Accountability Framework (UBRAF) 2016-2021

Charanjit Sharma, Asia and the Pacific Delegate



The June PCB meetings discuss the Unified Budget Results and Accountability Framework (UBRAF) reports, which include the performance and financial reports. UBRAF is the mechanism to monitor the progress of implementing the Joint Programme's work. The performance

reports include regional and country reports on fast track commitments; the accomplishments related to the eight Strategy Result Areas and Indicators Report (covering the previous Strategy 2016-2021); and, the organizational report involving the 11 Cosponsors of the Joint Programme. The reports reflected the critical impact of COVID-19 on the global HIV response in 2020 and the ways in which regional and country teams responded within the context of the pandemic.

With a new UBRAF being developed in consonance with the new Global AIDS Strategy, the NGO Delegation remains steadfast in its advocacy for the Joint Programme to not lose sight of the central role that people living with HIV and key populations face, especially in the context of competing global health priorities and resources. With many countries moving towards domestic financing, we note that much of this funding comes with restrictions, including for social enabling activities, human rights advocacy, and gender-sensitive/non-binary approaches activities. These circumstances clearly indicate shrinking spaces of civil society and more importantly, the shrinking of funding for community-led responses. We acknowledge the efforts of UNAIDS Secretariat, Cosponsors, and national health structures in the COVID-19 emergency response. We urge UNAIDS to address the dual pandemics

with equal importance and resources allocation by not forgetting to put communities at the center of the response.

Agenda 7: Statement by the Representative of the UNAIDS Staff Association (USSA)

Andrew Spieldenner, North America Delegate



The Statement of the UNAIDS Secretariat Staff Association (USSA) has become a more central part of the PCB meetings. In prior years, the USSA statements have raised the flag on internal problems the staff face, as well as alert the PCB to grievous sexual harassment and bullying occurring in the organization. With the new leadership in 2020, the NGO Delegation had looked forward to a better workplace for our colleagues at UNAIDS. While the report at the 48th PCB Meeting showed that some elements have improved, there remains a lack of trust and a fear of reprisal between executive management and the staff. Staff felt unsure of their jobs and reported being stressed. We acknowledge that this situation is common during the COVID pandemic, that all of us are experiencing imbalance between life and work, that most of our organizations are on unsure ground.

The NGO Delegation recognizes the USSA as the representative voice of the staff. In our [intervention](#), we asked for more transparency and respectful engagement between leadership and staff. In addition, we wanted to know more about the kinds of harassment still being experienced as the data was aggregated, as well as results of previous investigations.

Agenda 8: Follow-up to the thematic segment from the 47th PCB meeting

Violeta Ross, Latin America and the Caribbean Delegate



The Delegation's work started with our participation in the Thematic Segment (*Cervical Cancer and HIV – addressing linkages and common inequalities to save women's lives*) at the last 47th PCB meeting, in which we strongly advocated for the needs of women living with HIV in all our diversity. We also flagged the needs of transgender men who could be affected by cervical cancer and HIV.

Our [intervention](#) at this PCB meeting welcomed the report and focused on the inequalities that surround women and the intersections between HIV and cervical cancer. We urged for policies to become real, relevant, and accessible for women through programs that are led by communities and especially by women. This agenda item is a reminder of areas that remain unattended in HIV policy programming.

The decision points arising from the meeting that we deemed important were: empowerment and investments for Human Papillomavirus vaccination programs, screening, treatment, and prevention of cervical cancer with services provided by different types of implementers including those led by communities; scale up of technical guidance for countries; and, integration with primary health services.

Agenda 9: Update on implementation of the HIV response for migrant and mobile populations

Violeta Ross, Latin America and the Caribbean Delegate

The update was an outcome of the 43rd PCB NGO Report, “People on the Move, Key to Ending AIDS.” It was comprehensive and detailed on several programs across cosponsors, but it showed the lack of an integrated approach for HIV, mobility and migration. Years of experience on HIV policy-making at global levels have taught us that issues that are not addressed with specific solutions by responsible entities often fall off the agenda. Yet, our intervention urging the PCB to explore the creation of an international platform to elevate the importance of HIV, mobility, and migration was not accepted.



During the PCB pre-meeting, we asked an open question on the reasons why the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is not a Cosponsor of UNAIDS, given that this 69-year old institution became a related UN agency in 2016. We understand the bureaucratic processes and protocols about UN agencies becoming Cosponsors, but it remains a concern for us why a UN agency with a significant mandate addressing migration and mobility issues is not.

The NGO Delegation will continue to raise issues related to migrants and mobile populations’ increased vulnerabilities and its intersections, the limits of national sovereignty, and the multiple violations of human rights in the context of migration, mobility, and HIV.

Agenda 10: Thematic Segment

Iwatutu Joyce Adewole, Africa Delegate



The 48th PCB Thematic segment, “COVID-19 AND HIV: Sustaining HIV Gains and Building Back Better and Fairer HIV Responses” was timely in light of the continuing COVID-19 crisis. It opened with a powerful keynote speech from Naina Khanna, co-executive director of the Positive Women’s Network USA, who made the case for communities taking lead in the response, given the failures of political leadership and social and economic inequities. The session highlighted the impact of COVID-19 on the HIV response, not just on funding cuts, but in reversing the progress already made. Many communities of key populations experienced significant disruption of their lives, including unwarranted deaths. The key issues highlighted in many countries were in the context of HIV criminalization and the intersection of public health and policing, with the pandemic exacerbating the policing of communities and key populations. People living with HIV are at higher risk of severe COVID-19 illness and death, yet the vast majority are denied access to COVID-19 vaccines.

In the [intervention](#) done by the NGO Delegation, we emphasized the need to sustain funding and address inequalities as intersecting elements of the COVID-19 and HIV response. We also urged for responses that emphasize public health, rights-based, and community-led approaches. The Delegation will be engaged in the upcoming 49th PCB to ensure that decision points arising from the thematic reflect the perspectives of and respond to the needs of people living with HIV, key populations, and other marginalized communities.