



Elliot Colburn MP
Vice-Chair of the APPG on HIV and AIDS
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Mark.lewis@parliament.uk

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Wendy Morton MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
King Charles Street, London
SW1A 2AH

Dear Minister,

We are writing on behalf of the All Party Parliamentary Group on HIV & AIDS, and UK civil society organisations, to request your attendance at the upcoming UN High Level Meeting on Ending AIDS.

With the UK's support and leadership, incredible progress has been made in the global response to HIV. However, even before the covid crisis, global funding and political prioritisation for HIV was stagnating despite an increasing financial need and the situation has only deteriorated thanks to the covid crisis. We believe that at this pivotal time, Minister-level attendance is critical to send a strong signal of the UK's ongoing commitment and leadership of the global HIV response.

While sadly nearly 2.2 million people have already died worldwide from COVID-19, approximately 2.5 million people still die every year from AIDS, TB and malaria even with the enormous progress of the past two decades. COVID-19 threatens to reverse that progress and increase deaths, with nearly 75% of lifesaving HIV, TB and malaria programs disrupted.

The rate of HIV infections remains stubbornly high, with 1.7 million people acquiring HIV in 2019. Shockingly, AIDS remains the number one killer of women of reproductive age. These are all preventable deaths. It is imperative that we, as the global community, scale up our efforts now to fight AIDS, or risk undoing decades of hard-won progress and a resurgence of the epidemic at even higher proportions.

The upcoming UN High Level Meeting on Ending AIDS provides a critical opportunity for the international community to bring the global HIV response back on track and pave the way for the successful operationalisation of the UNAIDS Global AIDS Strategy.

We welcome the UK Government's political leadership in ensuring ministerial representation to both the 2018 and 2020 International AIDS Conferences. It was disappointing that the UK sent a senior civil servant rather than a minister to the last High Level Meeting in 2016. We worry that this can be seen to send an ambiguous message about UK political commitment and may also embolden less progressive states to push policies and strategies that hinder an effective global HIV response – for example excluding those most affected by HIV, such as key populations, from documents and strategies. While ministerial diaries are always a challenge, we hope that the fact that this HLM will be virtual will make it much more possible and likely for the Minister to attend.

The upcoming UN High Level Meeting also provides a critical opportunity for the UK Government to announce a recommitment in support for the Robert Carr Fund (RCF). As you will be aware, RCF uniquely supports global and regional civil society networks led by and working with inadequately served populations who face a high HIV risk and systemic human rights violations. Given urgent funding needs and how UK Aid to RCF delivers proven impact, we support calls for the UK Government to maintain its commitment.

In this shifting international context, renewed pledge from the UK to RCF at the UN High Level Meeting will demonstrate critical UK political and financial leadership within the global HIV response. In line with realising the priorities of both the FCDO's Strategic Framework for ODA and the new UNAIDS Global AIDS Strategy, a renewed UK commitment to RCF will send a clear message to other donors of the importance of accelerating investment in communities and will help to leverage additional funding.

To ensure the views of UK civil society, communities and parliamentarians are meaningfully represented in the Government's engagement at the UN High Level Meeting, we would like to request that The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office organises a UK stakeholder consultation meeting. We have valued how the Government has organised similar consultations ahead of other key international summits including the World Health Assembly and the UN High Level Meeting on UHC. Our respective organisations would be pleased to co-organise a similar consultation meeting with your Department and ensure participation from our stakeholders.



THE ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP
on HIV & AIDS

**STOP
AIDS.**

Network on Sexual &
Reproductive Health and Rights

We look forward to working with you to further advance the UK Government's leadership in the HIV response in lead-up to the UN High Level Meeting. We look forward to your response.

Yours Sincerely,

Elliot Colburn MP, Member of Parliament for Carshalton and Wallington, Vice-Chair of the APPG on HIV and AIDS

Mike Podmore, Director, STOPAIDS

Erica Belanger, Chair of the UK Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) Network, SafeHands Executive Director