



Ambassador John Berry –AIDS 2014

**Remarks for the Criminalization of Key Populations Session
International AIDS Conference
Melbourne**

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We are all deeply saddened by the deaths suffered on MH17. Let us each resolve that – whether their lives were ended by the violence of this week or by the scythe of this terrible illness over many decades – their deaths shall not have been in vain.

Their passion must now fire our persistence.

Their dreams must embolden our dedication to end this scourge, once and for all.

Their love must always be our light - a light that darkness, evil, or disease cannot ever extinguish.

The world has reached a critical moment in the fight against HIV and AIDS. We are now on the brink of an AIDS free generation. But reaching that goal depends on people being able to get the preventative care and treatment that they need.

Since 2003, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) has been working to control the AIDS epidemic by – among other activities – providing HIV testing and counselling and lifesaving antiretroviral treatment for millions of men, women, and children. Last year, we were able to announce the millionth HIV negative baby born to an HIV positive mother as a result of PEPFAR programs.

Although the programs we support in Africa and those in the Asia-Pacific region tend to have different areas of focus, they have one thing in common: getting services to those who need them most. Unfortunately, the criminalization of certain at risk populations and those who are HIV positive – and the stigma associated with HIV – are the very things that will prevent us from eliminating this disease entirely.

We know that criminalization is bad health policy. It is bad public policy. It doesn't work to prevent the spread of disease – in fact, it does the opposite.

While the United States still has laws that criminalize HIV status – as one of today's panelists, Nick Rhoades, can tell you from painful experience – we are working to be better, to do better, and to remedy our mistakes.



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I'm pleased that Iowa State Senator Matt McCoy was able to join us for this conference. He recently led a bipartisan effort to update and modernize the draconian Iowa HIV criminal transmission law – one of the United States' harshest – that brought Nick so much pain.

Criminalization laws undermine public health approaches to fighting the disease and limiting its spread. These laws do not reflect current scientific knowledge about HIV. They undermine our ability to get people into screening and treatment programs. More fundamentally, these laws wrongly stigmatize and marginalize those who are living with HIV and AIDS. We believe that one of the most productive public policy actions that we can take is removing outdated HIV criminalization laws from the books.

In his National HIV/AIDS Strategy – a first for the United States – President Obama has called for review and reform of HIV criminalization laws across the country.

This is a very good step, but we need to do more, both at home and abroad.

Around the world, new HIV infections are down almost a third in the past decade. Deaths from AIDS are down 30% since their peak in 2005. This is great news, and a trend that we want to see continue.

But the services that we – and our partners – provide are useless if people are afraid to access them, or worry that they might face job loss, ostracism, or imprisonment for seeking treatment. We cannot continue to reduce new infections if those who are most at risk do not get screened, or are not educated in prevention.

In both Australia and the United States new HIV infections are on the rise, particularly among young men. Those of us who remember the funerals of the 80s and 90s have no wish to repeat that era.

It falls to us to ensure that the next generation will not repeat the same mistakes. And that means educating our young people about prevention and transmission. It means sharing best practices. It means supporting the research that will lead to prevention and a cure. It means that all countries must lift travel, residence, and immigration restrictions on people living with HIV. It means that all countries must bolster their commitments to fighting HIV and AIDS through organizations like the Global Fund.

Most of all, it means that we need to make sure that being HIV positive – or being a member of the LGBT community – isn't a crime.



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The global fight against HIV and AIDS won't be won by relegating segments of the population to the shadows.

I look forward to the discussion. Thank you.