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**US Ambassador Calls for LGBT Rights**

*UNAIDS and others say the LGBT community is at greater risk of HIV infection due to criminalization, stigma and discrimination*

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The U.S. ambassador to Australia said it should not be a crime to be a member of the LGBT community. Ambassador John Berry told the 20th international AIDS Conference that the fight against the disease cannot be won by relegating segments of the population to the shadows.

Ambassador Berry said the world has reached a critical moment in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

“We are now on the brink of an AIDS-free generation. But reaching that goal will depend on all of us working together and being able to get the preventative care and treatment that everyone needs.”

However, he said there are many barriers around the world blocking access to prevention, care and treatment.

“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,” he said.

The U.S. Ambassador said that criminalization is bad health policy and bad public policy. He says it does not stop the spread of HIV/AIDS and, in fact, does just the opposite.

“Criminalization laws undermine public health approaches that we need to fight this disease and limit its spread. These laws don’t reflect current scientific knowledge. They undermine our ability to get people into screening and treatment. And more fundamentally, these laws wrongly stigmatize and marginalize those living with HIV and AIDS.”

More than 80 countries around the world have criminal laws against sexual activity by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Some of those laws contain very harsh penalties.

The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association says 13 U.S. states still have not repealed their anti-sodomy laws. That’s despite a 2003 ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court declaring such laws unconstitutional.

The Center for HIV Law and Policy says 32 states and two U.S. territories “have HIV-specific criminal statutes and thirty-six states have reported proceedings in which HIV-positive people have been arrested and/or prosecuted for consensual sex, biting, and spitting.” The center says there have been at least 80 such prosecutions in the last two years alone.

Ambassador Berry said the U.S. still has more to do in this regard.

“Now while the United States still has laws that criminalize HIV status, we are working to become better – to do better – and to remedy our mistakes. We believe that one of the most productive public policy actions that we can take is removing outdated criminalization laws from the books. The president in his national HIV/AIDS strategy has called for the review and reform of all HIV criminalization laws across our country,” he said.

Ambassador Berry called that a good step, but added more needs to be done at home and abroad. He noted that new HIV infections are on the rise in the United States and the AIDS conference host country Australia, particularly among young men.

He said, “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 does not repeat these mistakes.”

He said that means educating young people about HIV prevention and transmission, supporting research, lifting travel restrictions on those living with HIV and supporting the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

Berry also praised PEPFAR, the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, for helping to get 6.7-million people on treatment.