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Public Statement on Senegal's Prison Sentencing of Men Convicted of Sodomy

Human Rights Violations Against Men Who Have Sex with Men Continue to Compromise Global Fight Against AIDS

AIDS Project Los Angeles (APLA) condemns the recent sentencing of nine men in Senegal to eight-year prison terms for charges related to homosexuality.

According to the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), police officers raided the apartment of a significant Senegalese gay leader on December 19, 2008 and arrested him and his guests. Then, on January 8, 2009, each was sentenced to a total of eight years in prison for charges of criminal conspiracy and engaging in acts against the order of nature. Homosexual acts carry a maximum sentence of five years in Senegal, but according to the British Broadcasting Corporation, the judge added three additional years, saying the men were also members of a criminal group.

The convicted leader in the Senegalese lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community is reportedly the head of AIDES Senegal, an organization that provides HIV prevention services to men who have sex with men (MSM). Other reports indicate that most of the other convicted men belonged to the group as well.

Not only are these prison sentences a violation of the human rights of sexual minorities, they also have profoundly negative consequences for the fight against AIDS.

Stigma, discrimination and criminalization of sexual minorities exacerbates HIV transmission by driving LGBT populations underground and making it both difficult and unlikely for individuals to access HIV prevention, treatment and care services. UNAIDS estimates that less than one in 20 MSM has access to the HIV care and prevention services they need. Meanwhile, more alarming data on the state of the HIV epidemic among MSM reveals that, in low and middle-income countries, MSM are 19 times more likely to be infected with HIV than the general population. Research also shows that countries with legal protections against anti-gay discrimination have much lower rates of HIV among gay men.

Sadly, the imprisonments are at great odds with the recent International Conference on AIDS and STDs in Africa (ICASA), which was held in Senegal's capital city, Dakar, from December 3 – 7, 2008. The conference was widely hailed for its strong acknowledgement and coverage of the need to address HIV among MSM in Africa.