**Contribution to the Report of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Her Excellency Michelle Bachelet Jeria**

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The Government of Armenia, in close cooperation and active involvement of civil society (including communities and affected populations: persons living with, at-risk, or affected by HIV, and other relevant stakeholders), is committed to taking the necessary steps towards implementing the commitments made in the Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS: Ending Inequalities and Getting on Track to AIDS by 2030 adopted by the General Assembly in 2021.

Armenia’s national response to HIV/AIDS started with the advent of HIV in the country in the 1990s. Since then, the National Programme on HIV/AIDS Prevention has constantly been evolving by expanding the scope and coverage of its programs, and ensuring that interventions are:

* evidence-informed,
* based on human rights,
* respond to the needs of key populations in need of HIV prevention, diagnosis, treatment, care and support services,
* universally accessible in the country regardless of citizenship or residency status or care seeker.

In line with the WHO recommendations, Armenia successfully continues to implement the “Treat All” policy, aimed to improve the quality of HIV treatment and to bring the country closer to universal health coverage (UHC). Following the WHO recommendations, the country has revised its clinical protocols, whereby DTG was identified as the preferred option for treatment leading to the improved and optimized provision of care to people living with HIV (PLHIV).

A Concept of Introduction of UHC has been developed and approved by the Government in 2021 to introduce health insurance from 2023. The concept stipulates the inclusion of HIV and TB services in the basic benefits package covered by the insurance. Armenia has a well-developed decentralized system of primary health care providers, which is a solid foundation for UHC. With an extensive network of polyclinics across the country, primary health care providers are a strong force in extending the HIV services, including HIV testing, awareness-raising, and improving the health of PLHIV through counseling on general health issues.

The health information system in place allows to collect disaggregated epidemiologic data required for decision-making and financial information for the reimbursement of providers’ operation under the government health programs.

In 2021 the Criminal Code of the Republic of Armenia was revised, including the aspects related to HIV transmission. In the new Code, the provision of posing a risk to the transmission of HIV is eliminated, and only cases of factual transmission remain criminalized. The law on “Medical Care and Services to the Population” was amended, as well, now defining the terms of “medical privacy” and “personal data confidentiality” and stipulating restrictions for the use of personal data for the purposes of prevention and treatment of health issues, as well as targeted use of the data by medical personnel, including their authorization for the data, use in scientific and research work.

The country has made good progress in addressing gender-based violence (GBV). National Strategies and Action Plans developed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs as the liaison body for the implementation of the gender policy in the country are essential tools to promote gender equality and prevent GBV. The 2019-2023 Strategy for implementation of gender policy in the Republic of Armenia is currently in action. In 2019 the Government approved the decree on the requirements for the shelters for the survivors of violence in the family and the decree on disposal procedures of a temporary support account for victims of violence within the family. So far, the state has re-organized and launched six community-based support centers and operates a website providing information on available hot-line services for domestic violence survivors. During the 2018-2020 period, steps were taken to prevent gender-based sex selection (GBSS), including policy development, capacity building, and awareness-raising activities. A holistic, multifaceted approach adopted by the UNFPA to address the GBSS, as well as close collaboration with relevant governmental institutions, international and local organizations, has resulted in improving the sex ratio at birth in Armenia.

The country successfully continues “sensitization” and education on HIV-related issues of health personnel, including nurses, to eliminate stigmatization of PLHIV in health care settings. With the support of UNAIDS, continuous online HIV education courses for health care providers were developed by the National Institute of Health to address topics on HIV, self-testing, stigma, discrimination, and human rights. Noteworthy to mention that topics on stigma and discrimination were necessarily included in all other training programs on HIV.

With the aim of protection and fulfillment of human rights in the context of HIV and TB, a permanent Community Engagement, Human Rights and Gender Equality Working group (CRG WG) has been established under the Armenia Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM). The Community is fighting HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria for more than five years, acting as an enabler for the effective system of prevention, treatment, care, and support services for KPs, PLHIV and TB patients in Armenia. The CRG WG is a group of civil society activists representing organizations and/or initiative groups, which are majoring in HIV/AIDS and TB service provision, human rights protection, and gender equality issues, as well as communities of HIV key affected populations, PLHIV and TB patients. Representatives of governmental entities and international agencies are involved as experts and advisers. The CRG WG focuses its work on monitoring cases of human rights violation and discrimination, reports to the CCM, and suggests the actions that need to be taken.

In the past five years, the national response to HIV/AIDS was guided by the extended National Programme on HIV/AIDS Prevention in the Republic of Armenia for 2017-2021. Its goal was to decrease new HIV infections, maintain the country’s mother-to-child transmission EMTCT validation status granted by WHO’s Global Validation Advisory Committee in 2016, and ensure that 90% of all people living with HIV know their HIV status.

In January 2022, the new 2022-2026 National Programme on HIV/AIDS Prevention in the Republic of Armenia (hereinafter NSP) was adopted, the goal of which is to provide an effective response to HIV and to set the right conditions for ending AIDS by 2030. In this sense, the new NSP is a continuation of the previous national programs and aims to address the key priority challenges that constantly emerge in terms of service delivery (prevention, testing, treatment) and to enable social, legal, and policy environments. The new national program also aims to expand coverage of services and address new, emerging challenges, introduce or scale up innovative approaches, such as PrEP, HIV self-testing, dedicated services for transgender people, and measures in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The NSP builds on the same principles and shares the priorities of global, regional, and national strategies and action plans on HIV/AIDS, TB, viral hepatitis, and STIs, including 1) Global AIDS Strategy 2021–2026. “End Inequalities. End AIDS”; 2) Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS 2021; and 3) the World Health Organization’s 2022–2030 European Regional Action Plans for HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexually Transmitted Infections. It has four priority areas:**1. Prevention,**to strengthen uptake, comprehensiveness, and quality of HIV-prevention services with a focus on key and other priority populations; **2. Testing and treatment** to strengthen the uptake, comprehensiveness, and quality of HIV testing, treatment, and care services – with a view to reaching the 95-95-95 targets on testing, treatment, and viral suppression; **3. Sustainability**, to strengthen the sustainability of the national response to HIV/AIDS, reduce stigma and discrimination, and promote human rights and gender equality; **4. Strategic information** to strengthen the availability and use of strategic information for evidence-based decision-making.

Reducing stigma and discrimination and promoting human rights and gender equality are cross-cutting priorities in all NSP strategies. A number of activities in the NSP will specifically address stigma and discrimination, human rights, and gender equality issues. E.G., the revision of laws, policies, and practices with repealing discriminatory provisions that adversely affect the successful, effective, and equitable delivery of and access to HIV prevention, diagnosis, treatment, care, and support programs for all persons living with or at risk of HIV. Although key populations are not criminalized by law, certain legislative changes are envisioned to streamline the overall legal framework that underlies the national response to HIV in Armenia.

The NSP plans to continue the training and sensitization programs of law-enforcement staff, healthcare workers, and mass-media leaders to reduce stigma and discrimination further. It also focuses on strengthening the institutional capacity and systems of CSOs and establishing partnerships and linkages between civil society and government sectors. A comprehensive set of care and support services will be provided to PLHIV by professional staff and peer support volunteers in order to strengthen adherence to ART and regular medical examinations, including TB screening. The service packages contain social support, psychosocial counseling, peer counseling, legal counseling, and distribution of preventive supplies – depending on client needs.

While the NSP prioritizes prevention among key populations, HIV prevention among the general population remains important. In this context, specific sub-groups of the general population with a higher vulnerability – such as young people and students who may engage in transactional sex, or labor migrants, highly mobile due to their work need abroad – will be targeted with HIV sensitization and education programs. The NSP also seeks to strengthen existing curricula and programs on HIV and sexual & reproductive health in schools, colleges, and universities. In addition, special studies and operational researchwill be conducted to address specific information needs and inform evidence-based decision-making at the policy and program level.

Recognizing the need to scale up efforts for reducing the rate of new HIV infections and AIDs related deaths, including by increasing investments, we also call upon the international community, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, and its co-sponsor organizations to continue supporting our programs aimed at safeguarding the full realization of the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.