



## INTERNATIONAL WEBINARS AND LIVE EVENTS

### HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE COVID-19 RESPONSE\*

By the Global Health Centre (Graduate Institute) – 14 April 2020

*\*Moderated by **Meg Davis**, Special Advisor, Strategy and Partnerships, Global Health Centre*

***Emily Christie**, Senior Advisor on Human Rights and Law, UNAIDS*

In 40 years of **HIV epidemic**, UNAIDS acquired a solid **experience**. The priority is to share the **lessons learned**. UNAIDS was thus one of the first UN agency to **issue guidelines for COVID19**<sup>1</sup>.

**Criminalization increases stigma and discrimination**. It is a practice that we have seen too much since the beginning of the crisis. Solutions have to be more **inclusive** and **community centred**.

In **prisons**, it is very important to reduce the **number of prisoners**. **Resources** should be made available, with **health services** and access to **tests** available in prisons.

We need more **good practices**. **Civil society** is going to be extremely useful to provide them.

***Shen Tingting**, HIV/AIDS and Human Rights Advocate*

**China** repeated the same mistake that during previous crisis: **cover the truth** and silence whistle blowers. **The censorship led to the spread of the virus**. The government did not take the early **warnings** seriously, this allowed the virus to expand.

There have been a serious **human rights crisis in Wuhan** in the early days of the epidemic. **Migrant workers** became homeless in Wuhan from the beginning of the epidemic.

**Government strategy is to sacrifice a city to save the whole country**. But is it really the best solution, to sacrifice a whole city with millions of people?

***Allan Maleche**, Executive Director of Kenya Legal and Ethical Issues Network on HIV and AIDS*

In **Kenya**, we are seeing a situation where we are turning to the use of **criminal law and sanctions** to fight against COVID19. This is going to **challenge human rights**.

The **challenge** posed right now is that government must provide **clear and transparent information**. If they don't, **fake news and hate speech** can quickly spread, especially online. It can lead to **harassment and discriminations**.

When **lockdown** is imposed, how well **testing and healthcare** can be organized ? This is the question authorities must ask themselves. It is also important to **impose lockdown without criminal laws** and sanctions. The approach is to **invest more in giving people information** rather than to criminalize them.

***Rajat Khosla**, Human Rights Advisor, Department of Reproductive Health Research, WHO*

One of the key challenges every country is facing is **shortage of equipment and supplies**. The COVID19 crisis exposed the **weaknesses of our health systems largely caused by under investment**.

**Lockdowns** are one of the big challenges during this crisis. Certain countries limit human rights, under extreme circumstances. Human rights bodies impose some limits: any such measures must be taken **under a law**; measures must be **necessary and not excessive**; measures must **not be arbitrary**. One of the **key takeaways** of this crisis is the opportunity to **build back the society**. It should be done through a **human rights value driven system**. As we look into the future, human rights must be taken in account.

<sup>1</sup> UNAIDS, "Rights in the time of COVID-19. Lessons from HIV for an effective, community-led response", 2020.  
[https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media\\_asset/human-rights-and-covid-19\\_en.pdf](https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/human-rights-and-covid-19_en.pdf)