



**Press Statement  
For Immediate Release**

*Windhoek, October 15 2009*

A coalition of civil society organisations calls on Namibians to join a campaign condemning the sterilisation of women living with HIV without their informed consent.

In a briefing this morning, the organisations launched a public petition demanding that the government of Namibia, in particular the Ministry of Health and Social Services, immediately stop the sterilisation of women living with HIV without their full and informed consent in public health facilities in Namibia. The organisations also launched a campaign, which includes plans to march in support of the women when court proceedings, scheduled for 20 October, commence.

In 2007, reports emerged that women living with HIV seeking medical care were subjected to sterilisation without their knowledge or informed consent in state hospitals.

“The sterilisation of women living with HIV without their full and informed consent is a serious human rights violation. Namibians should stand up against this injustice which threatens the constitutional and internationally protected rights to equality, dignity, health, to found a family and to fair administrative justice, including the right to proper treatment by hospital administration through medical ethics,” explains Amon Ngavetene, of the Legal Assistance Centre.

“Namibia has an extremely high HIV prevalence, fuelled by stigma against people living with HIV. Women, who are already highly vulnerable to HIV infection are at particular risk of human rights violations such as sterilisation without their consent due to their HIV status,” adds Rosa Namises of Women’s Solidarity Namibia.

A pilot survey and documentation project conducted by the International Community of Women Living with HIV (ICW) and Namibia Women’s Health Network found that the right to informed consent was violated in all cases of sterilisation of women living with HIV reported to them. “Preliminary findings also indicated that the initial documented cases appear to be merely the tip of the iceberg,” states Veronica Kalambi of Namibia Women’s Health Network.

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The impact of sterilisation without informed consent can be devastating, affecting a woman’s mental and physical health and her relationship with her partner, her family, and society at large. “For many women pregnancy and childbirth is central to self-esteem and personal satisfaction. In a patriarchal society such as our own, a woman’s value is often determined by her ability to bear children,” explains Rosa Namises.

Sterilisation of women living with HIV without their consent also has serious implications for the health care system as a whole. “Fear of discrimination and mistreatment can discourage women from seeking health care services and can undermine the government’s gains in the provision of sexual and reproductive health services and the HIV response as a whole,” explains Amon Ngavetene.

The campaign partners call on all Namibians and civil society organisations to sign the petition and join the campaign to end involuntary sterilisation of women living with HIV in Namibia.

Campaign Partners:

Legal Assistance Centre, Namibia Women’s Health Network, AIDS and Rights Alliance for Southern Africa, Women’s Solidarity Namibia, Women’s Leadership Centre, Sister Namibia.

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**International Community of Women  
Living with HIV/AIDS**