



COMMISSION ON
HUMAN RIGHTS AND
ADMINISTRATIVE JUSTICE
(CHRAJ)

PRESS STATEMENT BY THE COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND ADMINISTRATIVE JUSTICE ON THE COMMEMORATION OF UN ZERO DISCRIMINATION DAY - 1st MARCH 2024

The Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice stands in solidarity with all vulnerable people globally in commemorating this year's UN Zero Discrimination Day. The Commission calls on government and other relevant stakeholders to take action in eradicating stigma and discrimination in all forms against women and girls, and key populations to protect their human rights and improve access to HIV prevention, testing, treatment, and care.

This year marks ten (10) years of the official commemoration of the day in March 2014. The UN General Assembly set down the day to celebrate the life of everyone to live a full and productive life, and to promote inclusion, compassion and equality. This year's theme, *'to protect everyone's health, protect everyone's right'*, focuses on ensuring equality and fairness for everyone, especially women, girls, and key populations. Discriminatory practices, policies and laws contribute to inaccessibility of critical health and social services, resulting in poor public health outcomes, especially for those in vulnerable or underserved communities.

Current statistics of persons living with HIV/AIDS in Ghana stands at 354,927, with an estimated 16,574 new HIV infections in 2022.¹ Females accounted for two thirds (10,927) of the new HIV infections, and one-third (5,647) were males.² The Ghana AIDS Commission and the National AIDS Control Programme have put in place various initiatives targeted at preventing new infections, reducing viral loads of patients and improving access to antiretroviral therapy. Despite these initiatives, Ghana fell short of achieving the United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) 90-90-90 treatment targets³ by the end of 2020, albeit, some significant advancement has been made in HIV/AIDS management.

There are laws⁴ and policies in Ghana that protect people against stigma and discrimination. These notwithstanding, issues of stigma and discrimination persist, especially against women and girls and key populations curtailing their human rights and obstructing their access to HIV prevention, testing, treatment, and care. For instance, the latest Ghana Statistical Service report

¹ <https://www.afro.who.int/countries/ghana/news/strengthening-fight-against-hiv-ghana>

² <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/females-account-for-two-thirds-of-total-new-hiv-infections.html> (accessed 27th February 2024)

³ 90% of all people living with HIV will know their HIV status, 90% with diagnosed HIV infection will receive sustained ART and 90% of all people receiving ART will have viral suppression

⁴ Article 17 of the 1992 Constitution of Republic of Ghana.

revealed 78% of women and 72% of men were reported to have discriminatory attitudes towards people living with HIV.⁵

Besides, women alleged as witches and banished from their communities also suffer stigma and discrimination among other human rights violations which require government intervention. The Commission's recent health screening exercise for women and children in four alleged "witch camps" revealed lack of medical check-ups to aid in early detection of diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, typhoid fever, and HIV. These vulnerable women suffer multiple levels of stigma and discrimination based on their gender, sex, age and socioeconomic status.

Another related challenge is access to healthcare facilities and testing centres, especially in rural and remote areas. Additionally, issues of long distance to healthcare facilities and limited infrastructure contribute to barriers in accessing essential services by underserved populations.

The Commission recognizes Ghana's recent commitment to the Global Partnership for Action to eliminate all forms of stigma and discrimination through evidence-based interventions, especially in healthcare, education, and workplace settings. Yet, there are existing gaps that require *urgent* action. Accordingly, the Commission calls on government to protect women alleged as witches from stigma and discrimination through operationalising the '*Anti-Witchcraft*' Bill passed by Parliament in July 2023 and awaiting President's assent. Also, the Commission urges all stakeholders to design and/or implement collaborative measures to combat stigma and discrimination through awareness campaigns and community sensitization programmes. This is significant because efforts to combating stigma and discrimination are critical to improving Ghana's HIV service utilization and outcomes, especially as Ghana seeks to achieve UNAIDS Project 95-95-95⁶ with the ambitious goal of ending the epidemic by 2030.



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⁵ <https://citinewsroom.com/2024/02/stop-stigmatizing-persons-living-with-hiv-aids-commission-to-ghanaians/> (accessed 26th February 2024)

⁶ This initiative aims to achieve three critical targets: 95% of people living with HIV knowing their status, 95% of diagnosed individuals receiving antiretroviral therapy (ART), and 95% of those on treatment achieving viral suppression.