Who Will Save Them Next?

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[ACT UP Paris and other] activist groups have now managed to derail several PREP [post-exposure prophylaxis] trials, arguably the most important studies for those at high risk of acquiring HIV infection around the globe. Similarly, [they] have endangered the funding and therefore the continuity of the International AIDS Conference. And lately [they] have prevented clinical trials with [a] promising and highly needed new class of…antiretrovirals.

“The methods of these specific activist groups are uninformed demagogy, intimidation and ‘AIDS exceptionalism,’ the last in the sense that they exploit their HIV positive status to get away with behavior that would not be accepted from others. Within the international AIDS community, such form of activism is only practiced by a tiny minority, but it has taken us hostage. Those who will suffer the most from the misguided ethical imperialism…do not live in Paris, but as usual in Nairobi, Johannesburg, Phnom Penh and Calcutta.

“There is no other area of medicine where activism has been so strong and has accomplished so much as in [AIDS]. Let’s be just a little brave and stand up to protect that legacy.”

—Dr. Joep Lange, CoChair of the 2004 International AIDS Conference, in the September Public Library of Science (www.plosmedicine.org)

In Cambodia, at least one in five female sex workers has HIV. Critics, like Dr. Lange, now wonder whether these women—long exploited by their families, employers and public officials—have also been exploited by ACT UP Paris. By disrupting the 2004 global AIDS confab, the activist group shut down a groundbreaking HIV prevention study in which many sex workers were enrolled, charging that it was unethical.

For more on this controversy, read POZ’s exclusive interview with Dr. Lange in News & Views at www.poz.com.

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