Accusations of Misused Funds at the U.N. AIDS Agency Raise Global Concerns

These UNAIDS allegations arrive after last year's turmoil involving sexual misconduct.

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The United Nations' program to fight HIV/AIDS is once again embroiled in a controversy—this time, over the misuse of funds—that threatens its work and raises alarms among its donors, including the United States, reports the Associated Press.

Last year, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) was the focus of an investigation after policy adviser Martina Brostrom accused Luiz Loures, the deputy executor of UNAIDS, of sexually assaulting her. What's more, she said Michel Sidibé, the program's executive director, offered her a promotion if she dropped the claims. A UNAIDS investigation into the allegations found that the agency was rife with abuse, favoritism and "defective leadership." In December 2018, Sidibé announced he would step down in June 2019, six months ahead of schedule.

Now, according to documents obtained by the AP, Brostrom is accused of "fraudulent practices and misuse of travel funds." Brostrom, according to her lawyer, is unaware of the inquiry.

The accusations follow an investigation by the World Health Organization, which oversees UNAIDS.

The claims could severely damage the important HIV-related work of the multibillion-dollar agency. Donor countries could lose faith in the agency and withhold funding, especially amid today's political climate, in which funding groups halfway across the globe is no longer popular. For example, after last year's sexual assault accusations surfaced at UNAIDS, Sweden suspended its funding to the program, which in 2017 totaled more than $30 million, according to the AP.

The United States—the largest donor to UNAIDS—expressed concerns over the new allegations. In a separate article, the AP reports that a U.S. State Department spokesperson said, "We are concerned any time that there are potential allegations of fraud or misuse of funds" but noted that the government remains "committed to ensuring that UNAIDS has a clear and robust approach to eliminating all forms of harassment" within the agency.

For background in POZ, read “Head of U.N. AIDS Program to Step Down Early Amid Criticism.”

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