Head of the U.N.’s AIDS Program Resigns, Effective Immediately

Michel Sidibé “leaves a soiled legacy.”

May 10, 2019 By Trent Straube

Amid a string of scandals, Michel Sidibé announced May 8 that he is resigning as executive director of the United Nations’ program to fight HIV/AIDS “with immediate effect,” reports The New York Times. Previously, Sidibé had said he would step down in June, six months ahead of the end of his term.

Since last year, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) has been the subject of investigations and unfavorable reports. Policy adviser Martina Brostrom, for example, accused Luiz Loures, the deputy executor of UNAIDS, of sexually assaulting her. She also said Sidibé offered her a promotion if she dropped the claim. A UNAIDS investigation into the allegation found that the agency was rife with abuse, favoritism and “defective leadership.”

Last month, it was reported that Brostrom was accused of “fraudulent practices and misuse of travel funds.”

As reported recently, the negative press damaged the reputation of the multibillion-dollar UNAIDS, which in turn diminished donor countries’ faith in the program. 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 Times, Sidibé “will take on his new role as minister of health and social affairs of Mali with immediate effect.”

“Mr. Sidibé leaves a soiled legacy,” Paula Donovan, the codirector of the advocacy group AIDS-Free World, told the Times. “His tenure serves as a step-by-step guidebook for any narcissist intent on abusing the power and finances of the U.N. system, exploiting global crises for personal gain, rewarding cronies, punishing critics, gagging any staff who dare to whisper ‘Me, Too’ and exiting on a red carpet.”

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