Why Move AIDS 2020 Out of the United States?

Advocates want the conference relocated.

May 14, 2018 By Trent Straube

Protests are a common sight at most HIV gatherings. But the International AIDS Conference 2020 (AIDS 2020) is still two years away and it's already stirring the ire of activists. When the International AIDS Society (IAS) announced that San Francisco and nearby Oakland would host the 2020 event, HIV leaders across the globe sent an open letter to IAS demanding that the conference be moved off U.S. soil.

"Under the policies and political climate of the current federal leadership in the United States," the letter states, "it is impossible to honor the five values of IAS by hosting AIDS 2020 in the U.S. at this time." (IAS organizes the conferences, scheduled every other year; it sums up all five values in its description of IAS as a collection of evidence-based, human rights-focused, inclusive and accountable partners working together in the HIV response.)

The open letter continues: "We refuse to stand by while those most affected by HIV within and outside of the U.S. are, at best, excluded and, at worst, put in harm's way by holding the conference in San Francisco."

As for who might be excluded, U.S. travel restrictions apply to sex workers and to people who use drugs. Additional restrictions may apply to visitors from Muslim-majority countries or those from Latin America.

AIDS 2020, scheduled to take place July 6 to 10, will mark 30 years since the event was held in San Francisco. In 1992, the conference was moved from Boston to Amsterdam because U.S. travel restrictions at the time prohibited people living with HIV from visiting. President Obama lifted the HIV travel ban in 2010.

Although many U.S. AIDS groups signed the open letter, the Latino Commission on AIDS welcomed the return of AIDS 2020 to the Bay Area.

As our POZ Poll (see below) and the comments on POZ.com indicate, our readers also shared conflicting views.

POZ POLL:

Should the international AIDS 2020 conference be moved out of the U.S.?

65% — Yes. Move the conference.

35% — No. Keep the conference here.

Poll results as of May 1

AIDS 2018

The 22nd International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2018) takes place July 23 to 27 in Amsterdam, Netherlands. The theme is “Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges” and focuses on reaching key populations in places where the epidemic is growing, such as in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. For updates, search #AIDS2018 and @AIDS_conference and visit POZ.com.

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