Can the AIDS Epidemic Be Ended?

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In his New York Times op-ed "The AIDS Epidemic Can Be Ended," Bertrand Audoin raises important questions about international human rights abuses against communities at risk for HIV/AIDS.

The executive director of the International AIDS Society cites the recent murders of Dwayne Jones (a transgender teen in Jamaica), Eric Ohena Lembembe (a gay activist in Cameroon) and Russia's recent anti-gay legislation (a ban on so-called "pro-gay propaganda") as examples of the threat many countries are posing to the end of the AIDS epidemic.

Audoin's premise is that discrimination and antigay laws circulating the globe have the potential to put untold people into a purposeful, perpetual health crisis:

Three decades of experience in responding to the H.I.V./AIDS epidemic has provided indisputable evidence that depriving those groups most at risk of H.I.V. infection of their human rights drives them underground. The impact is twofold: Not only do sex workers, men who have sex with men, drug users and transgender people live in daily fear of reprisals, but precisely because of that they are considerably less likely to access basic health services such as condoms to protect themselves from infection.

We have at our disposal the scientific knowledge to bring the AIDS epidemic to an end. But we cannot apply that science worldwide because so many people at high risk of infection fear recrimination and are reluctant to seek help from the organizations that can help them.

Unfortunately political leaders in many parts of the world are the true drivers of the stigma against gays. But it is those very leaders who have a historic opportunity not only to end such discrimination but to make a major dent in one of the world's most lethal pandemics in their own backyards.

The article specifically calls out regions like Russia (where injection drug use has contributed to nearly 900,000 new HIV cases in just one decade) and sub-Saharan Africa (where 38 countries still outlaw homosexuality).

According to the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals, global AIDS should come to an end by 2015. But Audoin argues that unless governments decriminalize homosexuality, injection drugs and HIV/AIDS globally, the epidemic will be far from over.

To read his op-ed, click here.

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