UNAIDS' Michel Sidibé: 'I was shocked'

February 15, 2012 By Sean Strub

At a meeting in Oslo, Norway, this week, UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibé was characteristically frank in his comments prior to viewing my short film, **HIV is Not a Crime**, and hearing comments from Robert Suttle (who is featured in the film). Sidibé's honesty is one reason why he is so widely respected.

"I was shocked, I am Executive Director (of UNAIDS), I am supposed to be very committed to all the human rights issue and trying to push this agenda... and I'm not even knowing a minimum of those unacceptable things that are happening around me. It was shocking for me and upsetting to hear the stories of Nick and Robert" said Mr. Sidibé.

To see more specifics about what Mr. Sidibé found so shocking, take a look at this except from the **HIV is Not a Crime** documentary project.

Unfortunately, Mr. Sidibé is far from alone, but perhaps his acknowledgement of his need to learn more about what criminalization means in the lives of people with HIV will prompt others to educate themselves as well. Even those aware of the phenomenon typically have little understanding of the severity of the injustices inflicted on those prosecuted or the devastating effect criminalization has on driving stigma and further transmission of HIV.

SERO Project is my new initiative to combat HIV-related stigma, discrimination and criminalization--including the **HIV is Not a Crime** documentary--and we are in need of financial support. If you're in a position to help, please go to this link.

If you scroll to the bottom, you'll see the "donate" tab. And if you're not one of the 14,000 people who have already viewed the short film I've already made (which is part of the larger work in progress), you can do so here.

Special thanks to Nick Rhoades and Monique Moree, who also are featured in **HIV is Not a Crime**, my cousin John Swaner and Broadway Cares, for their ongoing support of my work and to George Ayala and the Global Forum on MSM who helped send me and Robert to the meeting in Oslo. Also to Edwin Bernard (whose blog is required reading for criminalization advocates around the world),

Nicholas Feustel (who volunteered as a cameraman and gave me a much-needed lesson in videography), Bret Malone and the Philadelphia Center, in Shreveport, (for initiating advocacy to address criminalization and supporting Robert in this work), Susan Timberlake and Sara Simon of UNAIDS, Leo Herrera/HomoChic (who edited **HIV is Not a Crime**), James Krellenstein (a research volunteer and my frequent sounding board) and Xavier Morales, who has put up with my criminalization obsession in recent years with unflagging support and grace, including today, when I was absent on Valentine's Day.

There are so many more to whom I am grateful, including a large crew of amazing friends and supporters in Louisiana and Iowa, and various colleagues at GNP+/NA, the Positive Justice Project, POZ Magazine and elsewhere, but I'll get to them in due time. Thanks.

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