



Global coalition of women call for HIV prevention revolution for women and girls:

Demand that leaders, including Pope and Holy See, endorse and act on women's HIV prevention tools and sexual rights

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Today at the 6th IAS Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention in Rome, a global coalition of women representing international, national and local communities of people living with HIV/AIDS, HIV non-governmental organizations, and researchers identified recent developments as components of a potential HIV prevention revolution. They called on the Vatican to support and endorse the HIV prevention revolution which can benefit both women and men worldwide and is informed by a rapidly growing body of scientific evidence including new ARV-based prevention strategies as well as proven technologies like male and female condoms and male circumcision.

“Women and girls represent bear the heaviest burden of the epidemic worldwide. Until we have a full range of protection and treatment options, we will never end this pandemic,” said Louise Binder of the International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS. “Every day we withhold protection methods and treatment from women and girls, millions are infected, become sick, and die. There is now real hope that we can reverse this using new and proven tools—but only if women’s voices and priorities are heard, and not silenced by forces like the Pope and the Holy See. We therefore call on the Pope to remove the obstacles he has placed in the past and bless the prevention revolution for women.”

During the conference data have been presented by leading HIV researchers on ARV based prevention in HIV positive and negative people. These data provide unprecedented hope in the form of women-controlled strategies for women and girls who are both HIV positive and those who are HIV negative when added to comprehensive programs including male circumcision, male and female condoms and other proven prevention.

“We have evidence-based research at this conference that female-initiated HIV prevention is possible in the form of topical and oral pre-exposure prophylaxis for HIV negative women and treatment initiation regardless of CD4 cell count for HIV positive women. These findings are hugely hopeful and, with sufficient commitment, can contribute to a prevention revolution. We must have commitment and leadership to acting on these data so that we can finally stop this epidemic in its tracks,” said Dr. Elizabeth Bukusi, a leading prevention researcher at the Kenya Medical Research Institute.

The Holy See explicitly opposed the expansion language protecting and ensuring the rights of women and girls in the recently adopted 2011 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS. “In Africa, the numbers of women infected and affected are staggering. Countless women’s lives will be saved in my country and around the world if donors, implementers and religious leaders—including the Pope—make implementation of the new prevention science, in the context of sexual rights, their top priority,” said Mariliza Amony Marko Toban, a young AIDS activist from Southern Sudan.

Advocates emphasized that the data can be most effectively harnessed and the prevention revolution achieved only in the context of programs and implementation research that embrace and implement full sexual health and rights for women and girls.

“As women and girls, we know our epidemic and we must be a part of constructing, implementing, and evaluating interventions that impact our lives. One thing that we know is that offering women choices that include bio-medical interventions is a key to saving our lives,” said Ebony Johnson, ATHENA network and member of the AVAC ROAR cadre of US-based prevention research advocates. “We also know that in order for us to optimize the impact of new prevention technologies, we need progressive policies, laws, affirmation of rights and support from religious leaders to bring a legal and social shift in the harmful gender norms and social driver that keep women and girls vulnerable. This need is real and the time is now!”
