



Mrs Ulla Schmitt
Bundesministerium für Gesundheit
Friedrichstraße 108
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Brussels, 10 Sept 2009

Open letter - Call to prevent the World AIDS Day “AIDS is a mass murderer” campaign in Germany

Dear Minister,
Dear Mrs. Schmitt,

We are writing to you as Co-chairs of the EU HIV/AIDS Civil Society Forum (CSF) in relation to the World AIDS Day campaign by Regenbogen e.V. ‘AIDS is a mass murderer’ about to start in Germany next week, urging you to take appropriate measures to prevent it.

As important as it is to take HIV more seriously across Europe, we believe that this campaign, however well intentioned, is not the appropriate way to raise awareness or prevent HIV transmission. On the contrary, we believe it is over the top, tasteless, misleading and extremely harmful. It undermines years of effective prevention work in Germany which has successfully involved and included people living with HIV.

There are three main failings to the campaign:

- First, linking the risk of HIV infection to having sex with a mass murderer is immensely stigmatising of people with HIV. Stigma is the great barrier to an effective response to the epidemic. It is what prevents testing, and inhibits frank discussion of HIV status and sexual risk.
- Secondly, in its key message, the campaign is inaccurate. It makes no mention of the fact that in Europe effective treatment exists which means HIV is no longer a death sentence. People diagnosed in time can expect nowadays a near normal life-span.
- Thirdly, it provides no information on the posters or in the video of how to protect yourself and others from HIV infection – ‘use a condom when having sex’, ‘do not share injecting equipment for drug use’ etc.

Effective public health campaigns can sometimes use shock well - but irresponsible and incredible statements only mean that in the end people stop listening.

With due respect to the principle of freedom of expression: we believe that the campaign will seriously harm public health and will encourage stigma and discrimination against people with HIV.

We thus support the call of the Deutsche AIDS-Hilfe to stop the Campaign with immediate effect. We call on you to take immediate steps to prevent the start of the campaign in cinemas and television as planned.

Sincerely,



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The EU Civil Society Forum on HIV/AIDS (CSF) is an informal advisory body established in 2005 by the European Commission to facilitate the participation of NGOs and networks, including those representing People Living with HIV/AIDS, in European policy development and implementation as well as to exchange information.