

World AIDS Day, December 1, 2018 Statement

Whose Matter Is HIV?

The title of Turkey's very first Joint Declaration of 1st December World AIDS Day published last year was
"HIV has changed; Have we?"

We witnessed better developments over the last year after this declaration which we questioned if the social reflexes changed as fast as the scientific developments did since the time the HIV and AIDS were identified. And as a natural output of those developments, we observed a decrease in the numbers of new HIV infections in a dramatic way.

But it is not easy to say the same for the region we are in and particularly for our own country. We are witnessing a high-speed increase in the numbers of new HIV infections in the same dramatic way! So, 1st December World AIDS Day is a unique opportunity to understand whose matter HIV is and the reasons for that increase in our country. Hard effort and collaborations in between physician groups, VCTCs (Volunteer Counseling and Testing Centers) and civil society organizations working in HIV field in last two years to understand those reasons are promising developments for our country. Because World's experience in fighting with HIV/AIDS over the last 30 years proved that it is not possible to solve the problem without extended collaborations. Considering the best practices in stopping the spread of the HIV epidemic on Earth, the most important lesson to be learned is that political actors must have a candid attitude on solving the problem. Because the picture which will be seen when politicians and public authorities have no candid attitude on solving the problem will be no different than today; high discrimination and stigmatization, increasing numbers, decreasing awareness and concern, and finally the risk of losing the control on the epidemic. So at this point, we kindly remind you that the initial condition of stopping the spread of the epidemic is to have reformist and an open-minded response to HIV/AIDS fact and the political actors must have a dedicated will.

It is possible to stop the spread of HIV with the correct steps. This is why we support the message of the theme for World AIDS Day 2018 *#knowyourstatus* and call stakeholders, in particular, national health authority, to work in collaboration to;

- Eliminate the barriers to anonymous HIV testing,
- Make PrEP as an effective prevention method accessible easily across the country,
- And let the last scientific findings and developments about prevention such as the message U=U discussed and be well-known by all the healthcare providers.

Because HIV is not only a matter for those who live with HIV, but also for everybody else.

Red Ribbon Istanbul Association – Positive Living Association