

Introduction to the Women's Networking Zone

Building directly upon a decade of collaborative organizing around women and HIV at International AIDS Conferences, the Women's Networking Zone (WNZ) is a community built forum within the International AIDS Conference that is open to the public – and a place where community members, advocates, researchers, service providers, and decision-makers can meet, share, and learn together.

We view the WNZ as an inviting and inclusive forum for bringing together, local, regional, and global perspectives, as well as for bridging the gender, human rights, HIV, and sexual and reproductive health and rights communities. Our experience in convening Women's Networking Zones, as well as similar initiatives at prior International AIDS Conferences, has taught us how valuable a space for dialogue, skills exchange, strategizing, and networking the WNZ can be.

We are developing the WNZ at AIDS 2010 through global and regional consultations and an open call for peer-reviewed proposals in order to develop a geographically and socially diverse program with creative and interactive sessions, including debates, panels, workshops, and performances that focus on realities, challenges and best practices in effective responses to HIV and women. We hope to identify emerging issues at the intersection of women's rights and HIV and promote information sharing, dialogue, and exchange of experiences, skills and knowledge amongst various stakeholders, focusing primarily on gender-based and human rights-based issues.

The WNZ program and approach are based on a commitment to diversity, showcasing work spearheaded by positive women, and supporting the effective engagement of women, particularly those from the local community, in the International AIDS Conference.

Through this process, we hope to launch a strong network for women's rights and HIV across Europe and Central Asia; raise capacity and awareness on issues affecting women regionally, such as injection drug use and migration, and women globally, such as sexual and reproductive health and rights and criminalization; and challenge, catalyze, and transform our global response to gender equality, women, girls, and HIV.

Collaborating entities (to date, February 2010):

- AIDS Hilfe Wien, Austria
- AIDS Legal Network, South Africa
- All Around Women Special, Section of the German AIDS Society, Germany
- ATHENA Network
- Balance Promocion para el Desarrollo y Juventud, Mexico
- Blueprint Coalition on Women, Girls, and HIV, Canada
- European AIDS Treatment Group
- Global Coalition on Women and AIDS
- GSSG, Germany
- IAVI
- International AIDS Women's Caucus
- ICW Global
- Netzwerk Frauen und Aids, Germany
- PULSHIV, Austria
- Salamander Trust, UK
- STOP AIDS NOW!
- UNDP
- UNIFEM
- Voices of Positive Women, Canada
- WE CARE+ (Women in Europe and Central Asia Region Plus)
- Women ARISE
- Women of Color United
- World AIDS Campaign
- World YWCA

Learn more and join us

We invite you to join our efforts and share your ideas. We will launch an open call for proposals in April 2010 and will look to your experience and expertise to shape the WNZ program. Please send emails to womentovienna@gmail.com or admin@athenanetwork.org to find out more and to keep in touch. Or join our discussion and planning listserv by sending an email to aids2010-subscribe@yahoo.com.

Additional information about related efforts to organize a march around women and HIV at AIDS2010 can be sought by contacting womenvienna2010@aidswomencaucus.org.

Please also visit our multi-lingual website <http://www.womeneurope.net/> which will be updated regularly with the latest news.

Please note that the WNZ does not have any funds to financially support participation!

WNZAIDS2010

Women to Vienna & Beyond

A Women's Networking Zone at AIDS 2010

We look to the upcoming **International AIDS Conference in Vienna** as an opportunity to mobilize women regionally and globally, for innovative community-building and advocacy, in order to:

- 1 Advance an inclusive, diversity-rich, engendered, human rights, and women's rights response to HIV and AIDS.
- 2 Highlight emerging issues on women and HIV, as well as women's successful responses to these issues.
- 3 Ensure women's active and meaningful participation, especially positive women and women from across Europe and Central Asia, in the Conference.
- 4 Link positive, negative, and untested women regionally and globally.
- 5 Hold European bilateral donors accountable, both regarding women and HIV regionally, and for women's rights and HIV funding globally.

A shared history of organizing at International AIDS Conferences

The Women's Caucus of the International AIDS Society (IAWC) and the International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS (ICW) built the foundation for the work we will carry forward to the 2010 International AIDS Conference in Vienna. At the XIII International AIDS Conference in Durban, South Africa, in 2000, HIV-positive women leaders, advocates, and public health researchers identified the need for an independent forum where women from the local Durban community could engage with delegates attending the conference and where issues that were not part of the official conference proceedings could be raised. This need drove the creation of **Women at Durban**, a community satellite conference in which 300 South African women from Kwa-Zulu Natal and other provinces participated in workshops, panel discussions, and strategizing sessions. As a joint initiative of the IAWC and ICW with local partners, **Women at Durban** was highly successful in enabling greater communication between community actors and conference participants and in generally opening up a space for information exchange, knowledge transfer, and skills-building, in addition to critical dialogue on politically challenging topics at the time, such as access to treatment.

Women at Barcelona/Mujeres Adelante was designed to build from and expand the model of **Women at Durban** – to bring the voices of those most affected by the HIV and AIDS epidemics into the spheres where critical information is exchanged, networks are established, and policy and research agendas are formulated. Many of the primary organizers from **Women at Durban** came together to work toward the XIV International AIDS Conference in Barcelona, Spain. This group, led by the IAWC and ICW, fostered the creation of **Women at Barcelona** as an organizing umbrella within the conference and **Mujeres Adelante** as an independent, parallel forum for local community members. Both initiatives were undertaken in partnership with Creación Positiva, a local HIV-positive women's support organization in Barcelona.

The Thai grassroots woman leader sponsored by and participating in **Women at Barcelona**, Rung, went on to co-found the Thai Women and AIDS Task Force (TWAT) and to lead the formation of global-local partnerships under the auspices of **Women at Bangkok** in the inaugural Global Village of the XV International AIDS Conference in Bangkok, Thailand.

For the XVI International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2006) in Toronto, ATHENA worked in partnership with ICW and the Canadian groups Voices of Positive Women and the Coalition for a Blueprint for Action on Women and Girls and HIV. In an effort to continue the tradition and replicate the models of **Women at Durban**, **Mujeres Adelante/Women at Barcelona**, and **Women at Bangkok**, we convened the inaugural **Women's Networking Zone** in the Global Village. The strong community-driven program provided six days of skills-building workshops, strategy sessions, and presentations. The venue provided a space for Canadian priorities to be shared and solutions to be debated, and for community-based women leaders to bring their knowledge, questions, and success stories to the discussion.

ICW and ATHENA carried forward this model of global-local partnerships to contribute to the historic July 2007 International Women's Summit, "Women's Leadership Making a Difference on HIV and AIDS," in Nairobi, Kenya. We co-convened a **Women's Networking Zone** in the Sokoni, parallel to the Summit.

For Mexico City in 2008, Mexicanas Positivas, ICW Latina, ICW Global, ATHENA, Colectivo Sol, and Balance Promoción para el Desarrollo y Juventud partnered to form "The Alliance for Gender Justice at AIDS 2008." The Alliance successfully convened another **Women's Networking Zone** and a large women's march through the streets of Mexico City to strengthen national, regional, and global understandings and alliances around women's rights, gender, and HIV and to heighten the visibility and leadership of women living with, and affected by, HIV and AIDS, particularly in Latin America.

Moving towards Vienna 2010, AIDS Hilfe Wien, PULSHIV, GSSG, Salamander Trust, ICW, and ATHENA brought together a group of women's rights advocates from across Europe and Central Asia in Vienna in late October 2009 for a three-day consultation, hosted by AIDS Hilfe Wien, to map priorities, define a shared agenda, and establish the framework for the Women's Networking Zone at AIDS2010. This landmark meeting of 30 women activists from across the region also built the foundation for a sustained network for positive women in the region – and these positive women from across Europe and Central Asia will continue to be our key language links to reflect different issues, such as women who are asylum seekers, women who are economic migrants, and women who currently or formerly use injecting drugs.

We look forward to carrying on this tradition and building upon the momentum of the past decade to continue to encourage collaboration amongst the global community of advocates for women's rights and gender equality in the response to HIV and AIDS.

Selected priorities for AIDS 2010 and beyond

During a three day consultation in Vienna in late October 2009, the following thematic/substantive issues were identified as central to our work leading up to, during and beyond AIDS2010 in Vienna as particularly affecting women across Europe and Central Asia:

- **Stigma and discrimination**
- **Motherhood, and particularly the right to safe and healthy motherhood**
- **Sex and sexuality, sexual and reproductive health and rights, including the rights of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women**
- **Gender violence, including trafficking**
- **A gendered and rights-based approach to harm reduction, with a focus on women who use drugs and/or alcohol**
- **Legal and policy frameworks, including criminalization**
- **Women in prisons and detention centers**
- **Sex work and the criminalization of sex workers**
- **Migration and asylum**
- **Young women under the age of 18 years**
- **Issues affecting the aging population of women with HIV across the region**
- **Decision-making, including GIPA**
- **Lack of adequate funding for issues relating to women's rights and HIV**
- **Health systems and services**
- **Media attitudes towards positive women in Europe and Central Asia**
- **Public perceptions of women and HIV**
- **Gaps and challenges in creating a formal "evidence base" related to these issues**

*Globally, women from across the AIDS response, identified key areas of work for highlighting women at the next International AIDS Conference. We hope that these will be taken into account in future planning processes, from Vienna and beyond. Women.... **ARISE!***

Access to information, services, prevention, care, treatment, support **Rights** sexual and reproductive health and rights, property, inheritance, non-discrimination, equality, justice **Investment** budgets and funds for women and girls **Security** mental, physical, psychological, financial **Equity** education, empowerment, resources