

PRESS RELEASE

Winnie Byanyima to make first virtual mission - meeting with frontliners of the HIV and COVID-19 response in the Philippines

Manila/Bangkok, 10 May 2021: The UNAIDS Executive Director Winnie Byanyima will embark on her first virtual mission, a two-day visit to the Philippines to speak with communities, civil society leaders and representatives from the government to discuss the country's response to the HIV and COVID-19 pandemic. The virtual mission comes at an opportune time, just before the UN Member States, including the Philippines, will come together on 8-10 June 2021 for the United Nations High-level Meeting on HIV and AIDS to renew commitment to ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.

The Philippines has the fastest-growing HIV epidemic in Asia and the Pacific, with infections jumping by 207 per cent from 2010 to 2019, with almost 50 per cent of new HIV infections belonging to the 15–24 age group. To bring rising HIV infections among young people under control, the Philippines amended its national AIDS Law in 2018 to restructure its legal framework to keep pace with the developments in the science of HIV prevention, testing and treatment. The age of consent to HIV testing, without parental or guardian's consent, was reduced from 18 to 15 years old. Despite the law change, the pace to scale up comprehensive evidence-based HIV prevention services for key populations, including condom promotion, PrEP and testing innovations, remains slow.

Ms Byanyima's first virtual visit to Asia and the Pacific comes at a critical time for the Philippines as it deals with rising COVID-19 infections, which has sidetracked the continuity of HIV services, threatening the slow gains of the country's HIV response in recent years.

The virtual mission will kick off tomorrow on 11 May 2021 with a meeting with civil society leaders to discuss community engagement in the national HIV and AIDS response and how communities have dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic. Shortly after, Ms Byanyima will be given a virtual facility tour of the Family Planning Organization of the Philippines Iloilo Chapter, a reproductive health service provider and an advocate of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

"We welcome the virtual mission of Ms Byanyima to help amplify the HIV response in the Philippines. We are hopeful this visit will translate into greater political, technical and funding support to get us back on track since the COVID-19 pandemic has set us back significantly," says Anastacio Marasigan, Jr Executive Director of TLF-SHARE Collective and Member of the Philippine National AIDS Council.

On the second day, Ms Byanyima is expected to meet with Senator Risa Hontiveros and Health Secretary Francisco Duque to discuss the country's challenges and opportunities to accelerate its HIV response and strengthen the partnership between UNAIDS and key stakeholders. Before the mission concludes, Ms Byanyima will meet with the UN Country Team and Joint Team on AIDS.

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UNAIDS

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) leads and inspires the world to achieve its shared vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. UNAIDS unites the efforts of 11 UN organizations—UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, UN Women, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank—and works closely with global and national partners towards ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals. Learn more at unaids.org and connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.