



## Zero Discrimination Day: Need to Open Up and Reach Out Loud!

*March 1 is marked as Zero Discrimination Day. What it means for the global HIV/AIDS community and the rest of the world?*

*"Health services in the hospital was good, however the behaviour of the health workers was not that good". After the hospital officials knew that I was HIV infected, they discharged me earlier than expected." Male, Kathmandu*

### Zero Discrimination Day

Discrimination continues to affect the lives of millions of people around the world. Millions of women and girls in every region of the world experience violence and abuse and are unable to exercise their rights or gain access to health-care services, education or employment. Discrimination at work, school, health-care and other settings reduces people's ability to participate fully and meaningfully in societies and provide and care for themselves and their families. Many countries have laws against

discrimination but it is still a problem in all layers of society globally.

Discrimination is illegal, immoral, hurtful and dehumanizing. Too many people around the world face unequal treatment because of their race, religion, nationality, sexual orientation or identity, disability, gender or age. Discrimination can happen anywhere: at work, at school, at home and in the community. **Discrimination does not just hurt individuals or groups of people, it hurts everyone.** To counter discrimination and encourage acceptance several activities can be conducted such as speaking up when something is wrong; raising awareness; supporting people who have been discriminated against; and promoting the benefits of diversity.

On March 1, Zero Discrimination day is celebrated where people from all corners of the world unite under the theme of “*Open Up, Reach Out*” in order to celebrate diversity and reject discrimination in all its forms. The Zero Discrimination Day is a UNAIDS campaign of solidarity that stands up to racism and discrimination. The UN first celebrated Zero Discrimination Day on March 1, 2014, after UNAIDS, a UN programme on human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), launched its Zero Discrimination Campaign on [World AIDS Day](#) in December 2013.

Butterfly is a symbol for Zero Discrimination Day, widely used by people to share their stories and photos as a way to end discrimination and work

towards positive transformation. In 2013, UNAIDS estimated that 35 million people globally were living with HIV, while 2.1 million people became newly infected with the virus and 1.5 million people died from AIDS-related illnesses. [Globally](#), there are almost 80 countries that still have laws criminalizing same-sex sexual relations. Some 38 countries, territories and areas impose some form of restriction on the entry, stay and residence of people living with HIV. Furthermore, legal and social environments have not been conducive enough to address stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV and those most vulnerable to HIV infection.

[UNAIDS](#) has a vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. Without achieving zero discrimination, it will be impossible to bring down to zero new HIV infections or zero AIDS-related deaths. According to Ban Ki-Moon, “**Discrimination is a violation of human rights and must not go unchallenged and everyone has the right to live with respect and dignity.**” It is believed that some of the most challenging problems of the world can be simply solved by eliminating discrimination and stigma. Zero Discrimination Day draws attention to the millions who still suffer from social and economic exclusion due to prejudice and intolerance. Millions of women and girls in every region of the world who experience violence and abuse on a daily basis and struggle to access adequate health care and education can be supported by the Zero Discrimination Campaign.

### [HERD's Study among PLHIV](#)

HERD conducted a qualitative research study (December 2012-December 2015) in collaboration with University of Edinburgh, UK. This research study aimed to generate understanding around problems faced by people with TB/HIV co-infection and how they deal with it. The study used Participatory Ethnographic Evaluation and Research (PEER) ethnography and semi structured interview methods for data collection. This study was funded by Wellcome Trust and was implemented with support from National Association of People Living with HIV and Aids (NAP+N). People Living with HIV and AIDS were approached using NAP+N network. Likewise, two researchers from NAP+N were recruited and trained for data collection.



*HERD Researchers at Bheri Zonal Hospital*

This study examined how People living with HIV and AIDS (PLHIV) conceptualize stigma and discrimination. It explored various manifestations of stigma and discrimination at different levels throughout society as experienced by PLHIV.

### **Stigma and discrimination as described by people**

Stigma and discrimination is combined and used interchangeably by the PLHIV. The term “lanchana and bhedbhav” (stigma and discrimination) is often used together. However, these terms have different meaning to different people and the definition is based on their personal experiences. Where the majority of PLHIV define stigma and discrimination as people speaking ill to them, some perceived the word “AIDS” as offensive.

### **Stigma prevailing at different levels in the society**

Various levels of stigma and discrimination are pervasive in the society. This exists at the individual level, where one reacts and acts (isolates) himself as a result of experiences from society, at the household level where the act of discrimination occurs from the family members, at community level where the community people stigmatize or discriminate based on what they have heard or told by others and at the health facility level by the health workers.

### **Health facility as a starting point for discrimination towards PLHIV**

The data from this study notes a series of discriminatory acts by the health workers at different stages of treatment. This ranges from the point of contact with health workers- HIV testing, to informing the patient of their results, and the way the health workers dealt with patients whilst revealing their results, maintaining patient confidentiality, the amount of information given about HIV and the way it is delivered. Though it is an ethical obligation of the health workers to treat the patient's correctly, much of discriminatory attitudes and behaviour towards PLHIV stems from the health facility. PLHIV being refused for treatment and issues around bad behavior of doctors in certain hospitals and VCT centres are common practices and are the predictor of decrease service utilization and service dissatisfaction for PLHIV.

### **Need for global and local commitment**

Global participation of people is encouraged to achieve the status of zero discrimination in the long run. People can show their support for zero discrimination through drawings, pictures, audio and video. Contributions can be posted on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to illustrate personal stories about overcoming discrimination. On this year's Zero Discrimination Day, people are being urged to value and embrace diversity and recognize the diverse set of talents and skills that each person brings, talents that enrich society and strengthen communities. Welcoming diversity in all its forms reinforces social cohesion and brings valuable benefits to societies around the world.

#### **CONTRIBUTORS:**

Dr Sushil Baral, Sudeep Uprety, Sudeepa Khanal and Bipul Lamichhane