



The Honorable Antony Blinken
U.S. Department of State
Office of the Secretary, Room 7226
Harry S. Truman Building
2201 C Street, N, Washington, D.C. 20520

March 25, 2021

Dear Secretary Blinken,

On behalf of the global key populations networks on HIV, we congratulate you on your confirmation as U.S. Secretary of State and look forward to working together in a productive manner for the health and rights of all. We heartily welcome the U.S. back to the global health arena and applaud the Biden Administration for rejoining World Health Organization (WHO) and for ending the Global Gag Rule. We look forward to the U.S. reclaiming a leadership role in addressing global pandemics, including COVID-19 and the now 40-year-old HIV epidemic that we have dedicated our lives to ending.

We write to you today to bring your attention to The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), whose \$85 billion investment in the global HIV response has had a profound impact on the Key Populations (KP) that we represent: gay men and other men who have sex with men, transgender people, sex workers, and people who use drugs.

We urge you to take action on the following critical issues:

- **Maintain an unwavering focus on key populations.** The science is clear: key populations are at significantly higher risk of HIV. According to UNAIDS, key populations and their sexual partners account for 62% of all new HIV infections globally. These numbers reflect the underlying social, economic, political and historical factors driving HIV risk among key populations and hindering them from accessing the support they need. This includes a lack of social protections, criminalization of identities and behaviors, and a dearth of resources to harm reduction and other KP-appropriate prevention and care strategies. As budget pressure leads PEPFAR teams to reduce program budgets, we urge PEPFAR to align the HIV response to the epidemiology and maintain investment levels and programmatic focus on key populations.
- **Develop a new, 5-year Key Populations Strategic Initiative with robust funding support.** We urge PEPFAR to build on lessons learned from the \$100 million Key Populations Investment Fund (KPIF), which seeks to address many of the structural risk factors listed above and has made important initial progress. We urge you to direct PEPFAR improve upon this work and adopt a more equitable and transparent approach to Key Populations, one that prioritizes investments in KP-led organizational leadership, addresses human rights violations, and centers the response on KP communities as whole people, and not just as epidemiological targets. We call on you to direct PEPFAR leadership to work directly alongside KP-led national, regional and global networks to jointly develop a new KP strategic initiative and investment portfolio that builds on the work to date, commits itself to principles of mutual respect, re-establishes trust among KP partners, and sets forward a 5-year plan for this work, separate from mainstream PEPFAR objectives and funding.

We stand ready to work alongside your team to address any questions and to work together to prioritize rapid action on these issues.

Thank you,

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