



November 4, 2020

Dear Organizers of the International Workshops on Pediatric HIV 2020,

The International Community of Women Living with HIV (ICW) regional networks and our partners are deeply concerned to see a recent promotional advert, in which you advertise a debate about, “Whether U does not equal U for prevention of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV” at the International Workshops on Pediatric HIV 2020 on 16-17 November. Appallingly, the debate is slated between Dr. Jason Brophy and Dr. Elijah Pantsil, both men, representing academic institutions in the global north and is moderated by yet another man Dr. Theodore Ruel. The gender dynamics of this panel are completely unacceptable in this day and age and the choice of debate with regard to the topic of U=U is entirely inappropriate. We ask that you cancel or radically restructure this sexist, all-male panel and profoundly flawed debate.

As experts on sexual and reproductive health and rights, vertical transmission, and pediatric HIV care – through our work, advocacy, and lived experience as women living with HIV, ICW were shocked that, in 2020, an international conference could offer such a sexist workshop debating pregnancy and vertical transmission no less, solely led by men and without the voice of even a single woman present- this is sexist, patriarchy at its best. All male panels are deeply problematic, but it is extremely galling to have a such a topic debated by exclusively by men, no matter their expertise. Women, and particularly women living with HIV who are qualified experts on this issue must be at the forefront of dialogue about the issues impacting our lives

In regards to the content, we find it worrisom that the conference would create space for men to judge, and debate our bodies and experiences – and men based in the Global North for that matter – without thinking about the implications for women’s lives, our lived experience and the intersectionality of the women who are most affected by the issue of vertical transmission and pediatric HIV – women from the Global South. We don’t know what you are trying to prove, but the workshop’s outdated and insensitive methodology is inappropriate.

Further, the selection of a debate seems rigged to produce a specific outcome from the beginning because, there is lack of evidence, resources and research to decisively prove that U=U is applicable for prevention of vertical transmission. The poor choices of the session organizers and the problematic approval of this session by the conference organizers reveals at best a lack of thought and at worst an undercurrent of misogyny which affects the credibility of this entire event.

We call for an immediate end to this session as it is. We demand that the voices of women living with HIV, women doctors and those with experience in the Global South have a role in offering a



gender sensitive and thoughtful approach to dialogue about U=U and prevention of vertical transmission. We also call for women living with HIV to be present in the session as high-level speakers. A U=U debate that is obviously flawed and sexist can only send the HIV response reeling backwards - instead we ask you to evolve and create space for a sensitive and meaningful dialogue on vertical transmission and the potential to end it through treatment access, covering critical issues such as the need for more research, funding, and gender sensitive sexual and reproductive health and rights programing and legislation.

We expect a response with a plan for how you will remedy our requests by Friday, November 6th.

Sincerely,

ICW Asia Pacific
ICW Caribbean
ICW Central Africa
ICW Chapter for Young Women Adolescents and Girls
ICW Eastern Africa
Eurasian Women's Network on AIDS
ICW Latina
MENA Rosa
ICW North America
ICW Southern Africa
ICW West Africa

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