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TO: UNFPA Geographical Division Directors  
UNFPA Representatives  
UNFPA CST Directors  
TSD Director

FROM: Thoraya Ahmed Obaid  
Executive Director

CC: All Headquarter Staff  
All Country Offices Staff  
All CST Offices Staff

SUBJECT **Caring for Us - Setting Minimum Standards in all UNFPA Offices  
on HIV/AIDS in the Workplace**

UNFPA has a primary responsibility to care for its staff and we generally do this by engendering a culture of care. However, when discussing the HIV/AIDS pandemic it is not always recalled that HIV/AIDS represents a major threat to our own UNFPA workforce, impacting as it does on staff members' rights, their potential loss of job and income, and their fear of stigmatisation and isolation. Consequently, how to handle HIV/AIDS in our world of work is of utmost importance. Towards this goal we are now stepping up our efforts to address the impact of the pandemic in UNFPA's workplace. For this we will be guided by existing policies (UN Personnel Policy on HIV/AIDS, ILO Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the world of work), experiences and lessons learnt, but also by the achievements of UNICEF's "Caring for Us" Programme and other workplace initiatives.

#### Action Programme

What are we proposing to do? As a first step we have developed the attached Minimum Standards (see Annex) the achievement of which is a requirement of each UNFPA office. Key areas include basic information on HIV/AIDS – including prevention, testing, care and support and talking to our children about HIV – as well as information on policy issues such as confidentiality, protection from stigma, and strengthening procedures for access to quality care.

As a second step we will circulate to you in December a Tool Kit, offering step-by-step guidance for management on the implementation of UNFPA's Minimum Standards. Supporting documentation and resource materials will also be provided to enhance implementation and ensure that we respond to the vulnerabilities of our staff, and focus on achieving the best possible environment for a productive and healthy workforce.

As a third step, beginning January 2004, we will offer you direct support by assigning two Focal Points for HIV/AIDS in the Workplace. In the beginning, these focal points will be based in the Africa Region. Should this initiative prove successful we will then consider assigning additional focal points in other Regions.

As a fourth step we suggest you join UNICEF at the field level in the planning and strengthening of our joint "Caring for Us" programme. We have already done so here at headquarters and the partnership has been so fruitful that we consider national cooperation with UNICEF on this programme a key means of enhancing your efforts. For further details regarding the collaboration please contact your local UNICEF office and do so as soon as possible.

As you implement this action programme, I wish to remind you of our responsibility, as UNFPA managers, to make certain that our Minimum Standards listed in the attachment are achieved and maintained in all UNFPA offices. It is up to you to ensure that:

- (a) the rights, principles and strategies relating to HIV/AIDS in the workplace are an integral part of your office's annual work plans;
- (b) staff associations are fully consulted and involved in all stages of the development, implementation and review of workplace programmes;
- (c) special attention is given to involving people living with HIV and AIDS in the design, implementation and evaluation of workplace programmes; and
- (d) annual reviews on implementation progress are conducted and actions to strengthen them are agreed upon and included in office workplans and budgets.

Please also note that you will be required to report annually on the progress achieved by your office, in the attainment and maintenance of the established Minimum Standards.

Finally, I would like to reiterate that this is a most important initiative and one that has a direct bearing not only on the well-being of our staff but also on the credibility of UNFPA as we tackle one of the greatest challenges for humankind today.

Should you have any questions or comments on any of the above subjects, kindly contact Christine Bendel, Office of Human Resources, Advisor on HIV/AIDS in the Workplace ([bendel@unfpa.org](mailto:bendel@unfpa.org)).

Thank you.

**HIV/AIDS in the Workplace**  
**Minimum Standards for Attainment in ALL UNFPA Offices**

UNFPA staff and dependents have the rights to:	Indicators:
Information about UN policies, staff rights, entitlements and benefits, regarding HIV/AIDS and the workplace.	UN HIV/AIDS policy & ILO Code of Practice made available to all staff Officer responsible for human resources fully oriented to advise on policy All staff and dependents made aware of policies, rights, entitlements and benefits
Information on the facts about HIV/AIDS and how to prevent it, including discussion on stigma and discrimination related to the epidemic.	Current and accurate information materials freely available to all staff and dependents Orientation on HIV/AIDS, including gender-specific dimensions of the epidemic, made mandatory for all staff and made available for any dependents
Interactive learning/training activities conducted annually	Minimum 3-hour sessions held annually which are gender and socially/culturally sensitive, and age appropriate for all staff and dependents in compliance with the minimum standards of the UN learning strategy on HIV/AIDS Necessary funds are foreseen in yearly budget
Free access to male and female condoms.	Male and female condoms available in strategic locations within the workplace All staff made aware of their location(s)
Access to voluntary counselling and testing (VCT).	Quality-assured listing of VCT service providers that is updated regularly All staff and dependents aware of where and how to access VCT Learning activities in place to emphasize importance of VCT
Confidentiality in the management of medical information, including HIV status, in processing of health insurance claims (MIP); improvement of reimbursement procedures.	Confidentiality management procedures in place and adhered to Ongoing monitoring of office procedures in handling and processing MIP and other health insurance claims to ensure confidentiality Improvement of reimbursement procedures with regard to financial bottlenecks for staff members with expensive medical bills Staff trust in confidentiality procedures
Good-quality, confidential medical care, including Anti-Retroviral (ARV) and prevention of parent-to-child transmission (PPTCT) therapy, as indicated, if HIV-positive; access to vaccination as soon as it	Staff accessing services as needed. Procedures in place and known to enable access to quality care for staff and dependents.

UNFPA staff and dependents have the rights to:	Indicators:
is available.	
First aid assistance using universal precautions.	First aid kits in all official vehicles (e.g., IV, plasma substitute, syringes, etc.) All traveling staff receive first aid kit for their trip All traveling staff trained in first aid and what to do in the event of an accident
Rapid access to HIV Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) kits.	Valid PEP kit in country and available within eight hours Staff aware of appropriate use, administration and location of PEP kit, and how to access it
A supportive and caring office environment.	“Caring for Us” programme (or other staff well-being programme) in place and functioning Staff aware of how to access external counselling services.

UNFPA managers have the <u>obligation</u> to ensure that these rights have been fulfilled. These obligations include:	Indicators
Develop annual workplan on HIV/AIDS in the workplace to achieve and maintain the Minimum Standards.	Workplan and budget in place, updated annually based on experience
Establish/utilise an existing committee (e.g. JCC, Caring for Us committee) to manage and monitor the HIV/AIDS in the workplace workplan.	Committee includes staff/dependents living with HIV Regular (monthly) meetings held to review progress and advise workplan implementation
Report annually on progress in ensuring the attainment and maintenance of Minimum Standards (above).	Mainstream in existing annual report Annual report prepared, and reviewed by office management/staff committee, and available for annual audit
Review workplan implementation progress at senior management levels.	Progress, compliance, and best practice experiences reviewed, at least annually, by senior management (at country, regional and global levels)
Ensure confidential and rapid processing of MIP and other health insurance claims. Consider prepayment of medical bills through office.	Workflow reviewed and refined, as necessary, at least annually, by senior management Processing narrowed to limit number of staff handling claims Procedure in place for expensive medical bills to prevent financial bottlenecks for staff members