

INTERNATIONAL AIDS SOCIETY WELCOMES RELEASE OF SENEGALESE MEN IMPRISONED FOR SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Public Health Leaders Praise the Release of Nine Men Imprisoned for Their Sexual Orientation, Call for Laws Against Homosexuality to be Repealed

23 April 2009 (Geneva, Switzerland) – The International AIDS Society (IAS) today praised the release of nine Senegalese men who had been found guilty of “membership of a criminal organization and engaging in acts against the order of nature” on 8 January this year. The men’s convictions were overturned by the Dakar Court of Appeal on 20 April after defense lawyers argued that the accused had not been engaged in homosexual acts when arrested, but rather had been arrested based predominantly on anonymous tip-offs.

“We welcome the release of the men, who may return to their families and continue their invaluable work in the fight against HIV,” said IAS President Dr. Julio Montaner, Director of the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS in Vancouver. “However, we continue to be dismayed at the upholding of laws which allow the criminalization of homosexuality, and we call on the government of Senegal and other countries with similar regulations to overturn these immediately in the interests of public health and human rights.

Evidence shows us that criminalizing and discriminating against any group of individuals only serves to fuel the HIV/AIDS epidemic by denying services and relevant prevention messages to these groups.”

Dr. Montaner said that reducing the social exclusion of gay communities and other men who have sex with men through the promotion and protection of human rights was not only consistent with, but a prerequisite to, good public health. “Once discriminatory policies are abolished and stigma and discrimination are confronted, country-based programmes can be put in place to encourage gay men and other men who have sex with men to stay free of HIV-infection, thus supporting national goals of reducing HIV burden,” he said.

On 19 December 2008, police officers raided the apartment of an HIV prevention programme leader, and arrested him and eight other men. On 6 January 2009, the men were condemned to eight years in jail. Under Article 3.913 of the Senegalese penal code, homosexual acts are punishable by imprisonment of between one and five years and a fine of 100,000 CFA (USD 200) to 1,500,000 CFA (USD 3,000).

The IAS is the world’s leading association of HIV professionals, with more than 13,000 members from 188 countries working at all levels of the global response to HIV/AIDS. IAS members represent scientists, clinicians, public health and community practitioners on the frontlines of the epidemic. The IAS is the custodian of the biennial International AIDS Conference and the host of the IAS Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention.

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For further information, contact:

Ron MacInnis (Geneva, Switzerland)
Director, Policy and Programmes
International AIDS Society
ron@iasociety.org