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Minister for Foreign Affairs  
The Hon Kevin Rudd MP  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

9 September 2011

Dear Minister

### **UN Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS: the CHOGM agenda**

I am writing on behalf of AFAO to congratulate the Government for its role in the development and ratification by UN members of the UN Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS. I am also writing to highlight the great potential of the upcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Perth to further HIV prevention responses across the Commonwealth, including in our region.

Members of the Australian Mission to the UN and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade played key roles in New York in securing the historic UN Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS. Representatives of Australia's community-based response played significant roles as part of the writing group and in negotiations. This again demonstrated the value of a collaborative approach to achieving the human rights and health objectives outlined in the Declaration and which have been promoted over the last 30 years by governments throughout the Asia Pacific region.

The Declaration is an important advocacy tool to promote HIV prevention and the health and human rights of people living with HIV. In the region, AFAO will work with our partners to support them in their work to achieve the 50% target for access to treatments. Civil society groups have highlighted the danger posed by the removal or limiting of TRIPS flexibilities for the availability of affordable generic medications in low and middle income countries.

We were particularly heartened to see that the Political Declaration finally named some of the key populations affected by HIV - in particular sex workers, people who inject drugs and men who have sex with men. AFAO and its member organisations have worked for 30 years to support these communities in Australia and our region,

in partnership with affected communities themselves, researchers, Government and health service providers.

The CHOGM meeting in Perth in October provides an opportunity to begin to implement the UN Political declaration. A more concerted response to HIV is necessary across the Commonwealth; while comprising only 30% of the world's population, 60% of all people living with HIV reside in Commonwealth countries. Indeed, close to home in Papua New Guinea, the adult prevalence rate is estimated at 0.92%.

AFAO believes that Commonwealth governments must pursue the reform of laws that hinder an effective response to HIV in Commonwealth countries. We would like to see on the CHOGM agenda, reforms relating to the:

- Removal of Sodomy offences
- Decriminalisation of sex work
- Decriminalisation of HIV exposure/transmission
- Provision of harm reduction services to prevent HIV spread due to injecting drugs.

Given that the agenda for the October CHOGM meeting does not specifically identify these themes, AFAO would like to see an item of a more general nature - namely an item to allow discussion of the need for laws to support HIV-related public health outcomes, with the detail to be taken up in the workplan of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

We would be very interested in discussing this matter further with your Office. Rob Lake, AFAO Executive Director, can be contacted on [rob.lake@afao.org.au](mailto:rob.lake@afao.org.au) or on 02 9557 9399.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Graham', written in a cursive style.

**Graham Brown**

**AFAO President**