

Dear Colleagues, youth and adolescents on the call and friends and allies of the Society for Africa.

It is indeed a great pleasure to welcome you all to today's webinar on "Adolescent, Youth and HIV" This webinar is jointly organized by the Society for AIDS in Africa and WHO AFRO. This seminar is devoted solely to listening and hearing the often unheard voices of adolescents and young people. Sadly, our culture and the African context have strongly held up the notion that children – this sadly includes adolescents and young people or defined as anyone unmarried in many societies in Africa – should be seen and not heard in the open.

This voicelessness has had its untold impact on the epidemic in the region. While the incidence of HIV is going down in many other populations, it is still on the rise, howbeit slowing now, for adolescents and young people. The UNAIDS' 2022 Global AIDS Update shows that women and girls continue to be disproportionately affected; and that adolescent girls and young women make up 82% of people newly infected with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa.. A new HIV infection occurs every two minutes among young women and girls aged 15—24 years old in 2021. In Nigeria where I live, the 2021 report indicates that singles, female sex workers, men who have sex with men and people who inject drugs account for about 91% of all new infections among the adult population.

Adolescents and young people especially those living with in the region have also been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. A study conducted by UNAIDS in Nigeria and South Africa highlighted as high as 1 in 5 adolescents and young persons living with and without HIV had severe signs of psychological distress, In Nigeria, about 30% faced violence, 50% faced increased sexual and gender-based violence since the COVID-19 crisis started and about 14% facing sexual and gender-based violence experienced an increase in violence since COVID-19 pandemic started.

You will notice that the panel of speakers are largely young people youth supported by professional and technical resource persons from WHO AFRO. We look forward to them sharing their perspectives on the realities of their experience, how these fits the pictures created by the global, regional and country data and what more we need to do as collectives to provide the needed supportive environment for everyone to thrive. The Society for AIDS in Africa will continue to provide platforms for young people across Africa, to talk about HIV and gain

consensus on the key issues affecting adolescents and youth in their diversity. We shall promote dialogues, dialogue on prevention and PrEP, negative practices, sexual and reproductive health issues such as unintended pregnancies; unsafe abortion; maternal mortality; violence; sexually transmitted infections; HIV; exploitation, sexual and gender-based violence; and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

We believe that the outcomes of this webinar will be owned by young people, those working with young people, and policy makers so that as a collective young people will not be left behind in the collective global agenda of ending AIDS by 2030.

I will conclude by informing participants that the Society for AIDS in Africa is committed to host this webinar quarterly till ICASA 2023 where a special session on the issues that emerge from these multiple webinars will be discussed.

I wish you all fruitful deliberations.