



# THE UPR PROJECT AT BCU

## Statement UPR Pre-session on Eswatini Geneva (Online), 6-7 October 2021 Delivered by: The UPR Project at BCU

### 1. Presentation of the Organisation

This statement is delivered on behalf of the UPR Project at BCU, which was established by the Centre for Human Rights within the School of Law at Birmingham City University. The UPR Project is an academic stakeholder to the UPR and we have been engaging with the mechanism since 2016.

### 2. Human Rights Issue to be Addressed

This statement addresses the issue of women and girls with HIV in Eswatini, focusing upon eradicating stigmatisation and protecting female sex workers.

### 3. Statement

#### A. Follow up to Namibia's Second Cycle Review

In the 2016 review, nine recommendations were made on HIV, by **Haiti, Angola, Ukraine, Libya, Turkey, Uganda, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, and Ethiopia**. Disappointingly, no States made specific recommendations regarding *women and girls* with HIV. We implore Member States to formulate clear and specific recommendations focused upon eradicating the stigma faced by women and girls with HIV, and protecting female sex workers from HIV, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 5 which aims for gender equality.

#### B. Developments Since the Second Cycle Review

The Kingdom of Eswatini should be commended for its action around antiretroviral treatment, as around 95% of those infected with HIV can now access antiretrovirals. However, there is still much work to be done in Eswatini, particularly in terms of women and girls, as over 60% of those aged over 15 and living with HIV are women. This is a particularly sensitive issue that must be addressed, as gender inequality more generally is pervasive across the country.

The government should focus its efforts on tackling the stigmatisation of women and girls with HIV and protecting female sex workers from HIV.

- **Eradicating Stigmatisation.** It is widely agreed that the education provision in Eswatini regarding HIV and AIDS is poor. Whilst the government runs radio and television programmes to inform the public about HIV, it should extend this provision with a focus on the dangers of stigmatisation, particularly for women and girls.
- **Protecting Female Sex Workers.** Eswatini has the highest rate of HIV amongst sex workers in the world, with around 60.5% being infected. They also face discrimination and abuse from those in positions of authority. This makes accessing healthcare, including HIV testing and treatment, incredibly difficult for female sex workers.

### C. Recommendations

The UPR Project at BCU recommends that the Kingdom of Eswatini should:

- i. Ensure that all people in Eswatini are educated about how HIV is transmitted and the dangers of stigmatisation, particularly for women and girls. This should include formal education and training, and other, alternative sources of media.
- ii. Ensure that female sex workers in Eswatini will be part of PEPFAR's HIV self-testing, to avoid exacerbating the gender divide in relation to HIV even further.
- iii. Ensure that female sex workers in Eswatini are made a high priority for Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP), with clear and targeted messaging being utilised to avoid further stigmatisation of this vulnerable community.

Many thanks for your attention. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or would like to discuss the issue of women and girls with HIV in Eswatini further.

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