

# Your Freedom of Choice



## HIV+

### DISCRIMINATION KILLS

**People with HIV are stigmatized.** Even their widows and orphans are persecuted as pariahs in many countries in the world. In Russia, HIV-positive children are often isolated in special orphanages or hospital wards. Even in Western countries, HIV-positives still report that dentists will only treat them at the end of consultation hours, or that doctors refuse them continued treatment. Many countries impose entry restrictions on people with HIV.

**Discrimination causes sickness and death.** Marginalization and scapegoating lead to isolation and serious psychological damage. Many people fear the stigma more than AIDS itself, and keep their HIV-positive status a secret – often with deadly consequences. Many need medical help, but shy away from doctors. Others lack the courage to take an HIV test and only learn of their infection when they fall seriously ill. A woman from the US state of Missouri once reported to Human Rights Watch that she threw away her medication when relatives came to visit for fear that her family would find out that she had HIV.

**People with HIV are criminalized.** Transmitting HIV or only exposing others to the virus is a criminal offense in many countries, and in such cases those with HIV are always held responsible. Consensual sexual encounters are turned into crimes with a perpetrator and a victim, reinforcing the stigmatization of people with HIV.

**Discrimination helps the spread of HIV.** Wherever people with HIV are threatened with marginalization and punishment, the virus becomes a taboo. That often means that protection against HIV is not mentioned before sex or shared drug use. If authorities refuse to implement effective HIV prevention, leaving people with HIV to fend for themselves, and don't make treatments available to those who need them, the consequences are invariably fatal. This is the case, for example, in Missouri, which has one of the highest AIDS rates in the US.

**Discrimination can be cured!** It is vital that we create a culture of openness, where HIV-positive people are not afraid to disclose their status. Talking about sex and drug use should not be taboo. Other essential measures include:

- Access to medical treatment!
- Non-discriminatory access to social security!
- No employment bans for people with HIV!
- Unrestricted freedom to travel!

People with HIV have the right to decide for themselves how they want to live their lives. But they can only do that if they are not stigmatized or discriminated against.

**Freedom of choice for people with HIV! Now!**