



## **Zimbabwe: Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 25 September 2009**

### **Treatment of HIV positive persons in Zimbabwe**

The *US Department of State* reports under section Other Societal Abuses and Discrimination:

"The government had a national HIV/AIDS policy that prohibited discrimination against persons living with HIV/AIDS, and the law aims to protect against discrimination of workers in the private sector and parastatals. Despite these provisions, societal discrimination against persons affected by HIV/AIDS remained a problem. Although there was an active information campaign by international and local NGOs, the Ministry of Health, and the National AIDS Council to destigmatize HIV/AIDS, ostracism and condemnation of those affected by HIV/AIDS continued." (US Department of State (25 February 2009) *2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Zimbabwe*)

*An International Treatment Preparedness Coalition* report from May 2009 states;

"As a result of violence or the threat or fear of violence, many women who get tested do not collect their results. There have been reports of women being abandoned after testing HIV-positive and reports of violence linked to a woman's HIV status." (International Treatment Preparedness Coalition (May 2009) *Missing the target 7: Failing Women, Failing Children: HIV, Vertical Transmission and Women's Health*)

The same page adds that

"HIV-related stigma remains strong in Zimbabwe, but several respondents said they perceived a lessening of stigma due to increased openness about HIV, particularly when people in leadership positions disclose their status." (ibid)

A paper published by *United Nations General Assembly (UNGASS)* in 2008 points out that;

"The future course of the Zimbabwe's HIV and AIDS epidemic depends on a number of variables including knowledge levels on HIV and AIDS among the general population, reduction in stigma, risk behaviour modification and adoption of positive behaviours leading to increase in uptake of prevention services." (United Nations General Assembly (UNGASS) (2008) *United Nations General Assembly (Ungass) Report On Hiv And Aids*)

An undated document from *IRIN News* says "Stigma surrounding HIV and AIDS remains one of the biggest obstacles to the effective treatment and care of

people infected and affected by HIV.” (IRIN News (Undated) *Country Profile: Zimbabwe, AIDS Programmes*)

USAID states:

”In the USAID-funded television advertisement, Mazodze explains that he was so ill that his parents started distributing his property. His local pastor even advised his father to take him to a rural area in preparation for his funeral. Mazodze says that by publicly disclosing and accepting his status, he has learned to move forward positively and challenge the stigma associated with HIV at a community and family level. His testimony also provides evidence that people living with HIV/AIDS can improve their health and extend their lives with proper treatment.

The mass media campaign has generated muchneeded dialogue and discussion regarding HIV-related stigma and discrimination. By portraying real-life experiences from role models, the campaign conveys the messages that everyone is vulnerable to HIV and that people with HIV can lead productive and happy lives.” (USAID (24 August 2009) *Reducing the HIV Stigma By Speaking Up*)

A report by Avert states:

”Despite a high level of awareness, HIV and AIDS remain highly stigmatised in Zimbabwe. People living with HIV are often perceived as having done something wrong, and discrimination is frequently directed at both them and their families. Many people are afraid to get tested for HIV for fear of being socially alienated, losing their partner or losing their job. Those who do know their status rarely make it publicly known, which often means that they do not have access to sufficient care and support.

There is a feeling in Zimbabwe that the stigma surrounding HIV is gradually diminishing, although it remains a significant problem. Various attempts have been made to improve the situation, such as the 2005 “Don’t be negative about being positive” campaign. Organised by PSI-Zimbabwe, this campaign encouraged people to reveal their HIV-positive status and to share their stories. The organisers won the 2005 Global Media Award for their work.” (Avert (18 September 2009) *HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe*)

A report by Médecins Sans Frontièresstates;

”The worst problem, he explains, is the stigma. “They are just ostracized. They are labeled. They carry that with them wherever they go,” says Christopher, who has been a Counselor with MSF for four years. “They have to fight their war, but before they fight and win their war they have to understand themselves first.”

The stigma and discrimination against HIV people in Zimbabwe is pervasive. Christopher explains that many of the HIV positive parents don’t disclose to anybody their status, not even to their own children. And then when they find out the children are positive as well they try to hide it from them. “Sometimes,” Christopher says, “the children find out they have the virus by overhearing a

whispered conversation. They perceive that it is something to be ashamed of. Almost no HIV child in Zimbabwe discloses their status to their friends at school or to their teachers and even among their own family only a select few will know.” (Médecins Sans Frontières (23 October 2008) *VOICES FROM THE FIELD: Listening to HIV-positive kids in Zimbabwe*)

## References

Avert (18 September 2009) *HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe*  
<http://www.avert.org/aids-zimbabwe.htm>  
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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any

particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

**Sources Consulted:**

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Human Rights Watch  
Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada  
International Treatment Preparedness Coalition  
Lexis Nexis  
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Refugee Documentation Centre Library  
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