



## Regional Consultation on 'Towards an Effective Advocacy on HIV and AIDS for Upholding Dignity of Gender and Sexual Minorities'

### Concept Paper

Date: March 24 - 25, 2022

Venue: Online (Zoom)

#### Rationale:

The Asia region is home to an estimated 5.8 million people living with HIV in 2019 (UNAIDS Report, 2020). China, India, and Indonesia account for almost three-quarters of the total number of people living with HIV in the region. In 2019, 300,000 people became infected with HIV in the region. Three-quarters of these infections occurred among key populations and their partners. Risk behaviour such as multiple sex partners and low rates of condom use among men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender people need to be address, otherwise it will contribute more to the rising HIV cases in the region. By 2020, almost 50 percent of all new infections in Asia were predominantly among men who have sex with men, according to the UN Commission on AIDS in Asia.

Structural factors, such as stigma, discrimination and violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity and the criminalization of same-sex sexual practices, contribute to hindering the availability, access and uptake of HIV prevention, testing and treatment services among gay men and other men who have sex with men.

The criminalization among the practices of the vulnerable population intersects with HIV and AIDS in multiple ways. Flawed public health arguments may once have provided flimsy arguments in support of criminalization. Today, however, there is overwhelming empirical evidence demonstrating the causal link between criminalization and increased rates of HIV transmission. Experts have repeatedly concluded that, rather than halting the spread of HIV, the criminalization of identity, expression and orientation seriously impedes the effectiveness of measures designed to halt and reverse the HIV pandemic.

Decriminalization is thus a key element of any effective public health strategy particularly any relating to reducing the incidence and prevalence of HIV. Addressing the stigmatization of the vulnerable groups is necessary to address the disproportionately high HIV rates among MSM and trans women, as well as the specific vulnerability of lesbian and bisexual women and trans men where risks emerge; which in turn is a crucial aspect of any national or international response to HIV/ AIDS.

The global evidence is clear that public health is best served by removing discrimination and prejudice against vulnerable groups and thereby ensuring that the widest possible information regarding safe sex practices, health services and HIV prevention and treatment measures is accessible to the people who need it most.



The continued criminalization is a major barrier to stemming the transmission of HIV in Asia. Additionally, the criminalization of certain identity, expression and orientation raises several HIV related human rights concerns. On a societal level, criminalization is an indicator of poor human rights protection in general. It is known that poor human rights protection overall enables HIV transmission and hinders access to treatment. On an individual level, criminalization acts as a further barrier for them to access HIV testing and healthcare, placing them at a discriminatory and systematic disadvantage when trying to realize their health-related human rights.

Replacing discriminative laws with supportive national policies can reduce the stigma and discrimination experienced by PLHIVs and vulnerable groups. And challenging laws and addressing harmful social, sexual, and gender norms that increase the vulnerability of key populations to HIV are vital for effective HIV responses across the region.

CCA acknowledges the importance of addressing the vulnerabilities of HIV and AIDS in the community. To combat the disease, it is important to address human sexuality and reproductive health and ensure the practice of safer sexual behaviors.

As part of the ATCHAA initiatives, CCA will provide a platform where we can equip ourselves with the subject better and discussed various strategies for the Churches and congregants to properly address the issue. A clamor for the churches to provide a space in discussing about the matter has been growing and as a response, CCA will conduct a regional consultation among member churches and councils to have a common understanding and discuss the way forward of the church.

HIV and AIDS and other issues related to it has been a special focus of the Christian Conference of Asia's programme priorities. Several skill building and advocacy programmes have been initiated by CCA to address concerns, as well as efforts to build an HIV competent church and community in Asia. In order to effectively respond to HIV and AIDS with the member Churches and Councils, CCA is continuing a journey on building capacity of its members to become inclusive and relevant for People Living with HIV and AIDS through Action Together to Combat HIV and AIDS in Asia (ATCHAA) programme.

#### **Objectives:**

- To have a relevant and contextual theological understanding of the Vulnerabilities of HIV and AIDS
- To define common strategies on the role of faith and faith-based institutions in responding to the issues of Identity, Expression and Orientation.
- To create an inclusive and welcoming space for PLHIV and other vulnerable groups
- To advocate for Treatment, Care and Support for PLHIVs and other vulnerable groups
- To understand gender and sexual diversity and its connection to HIV programming and services
- To bring attention to criminal provisions on marginalized communities

#### **Expected Outcome**

- Participants are equipped with knowledge regarding vulnerabilities of HIV and AIDS
- Exchange of Learning on various models of best practices in the region
- Advocacy and networking among participants to challenge existing discriminatory legal barriers
- Updated knowledge on HIV and AIDS and related issues especially during COVID-19 Pandemic
- Faith communities become enabling, welcoming, and inclusive



### Programme Schedule

Time	Day 1: March 24	Day 2: March 25
13:00 – 13:15	Opening Worship	5 minutes recap
13:15 – 14:00	Opening Address	Session 3: <b><i>Addressing the Spectrum of Sexual and Gender Expression: Ensuring Rights-based approach response</i></b>  15 minutes - Open Space (Question and Answer)
14:00 – 14:05	5 minutes Break	5 minutes Break
14:05 – 14:45	Session 1: <b><i>An overview of the Legal barriers: Implications of criminalizing HIV, Identity, Expression and Orientation in HIV response in Asia</i></b>	Session 4: <b><i>Gender-transformative approaches within the HIV response: A focus on Gender Dimensions in HIV programming</i></b>
14:45 – 15:00	Open Space (Question and Answer)	Open Space (Question and Answer)
15:00 – 15:05	5 minutes break	5 minutes break
15:05 – 15:45	Session 2: <b><i>Breaking Barriers: A theological reflection towards overcoming stigma and discrimination and creating an inclusive and enabling environment for gender minorities</i></b>	Session 5: <b><i>Building intersectionality in creating an enabling environment: A wholistic approach on the way forward</i></b>
15:45 – 16:00	Open Space (Question and Answer)	Open Space (Question and Answer)
16:00 – 16:05	5 minutes Break	5 minutes Break
16:05 – 16:30	Day 1 Focus-group discussions	Closing Session