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Berlin, 08. May 2015

Dear Ministers of the Cabinet of the Republic of Latvia,

It is now more than three decades since the AIDS epidemic first emerged, and though we can point to some areas of the world where HIV/AIDS has been effectively addressed, the economic and social impact of the disease is still immense, globally and in Europe. Particularly troublesome is the situation in Latvia, where the AIDS case rate in 2013 with 6.6 is the highest in the European Union (EU).<sup>1</sup> The rate of cumulated total AIDS cases until 2014 stands at unwarrantable 24.4%.<sup>2</sup>

On April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2015 the Steering Committee of AIDS Action Europe, a network of 440 AIDS-organisations, covering 46 countries in Europe and Central Asia, participated in a Round Table discussion with local NGOs, health officials, local media, and LIC administrative staff in Riga. We are deeply concerned about ongoing policies and the lack of political will in the response to HIV and AIDS in Latvia that has one of the EU's highest HIV infection rates (16.8 in 2013<sup>3</sup>), a triple rate compared to the EU and is the country with the highest AIDS case rate in the EU that stands 7 times higher than that of EU average in 2013.<sup>4</sup>

In spite of Latvia leading EU in its GDP growth since 2010, the health care standards and access to treatments have annually fallen to now Latvia being at the bottom of all major Europe's and WHO health system rankings, with its most devastating effects being on the vulnerable segments of its

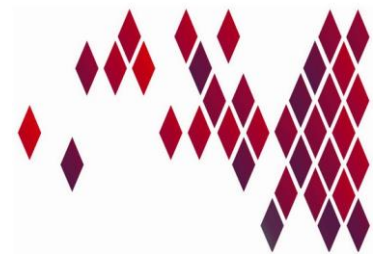
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<sup>1</sup> European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC)/WHO Regional Office for Europe. HIV/AIDS surveillance in Europe 2013. Stockholm: European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control; 2014, Table 15, p 55.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.spkc.gov.lv/hiv-aids/>

<sup>3</sup> ECDC 2014, table 1, p. 23

<sup>4</sup> ECDC 2014, table 15, p 55.



population. Latvia is the only country in the EU, where ARV therapy is only initiated at 200 CD4 cells/mm<sup>3</sup>, which is one of the main reasons why Latvia has the highest AIDS death rate in the EU. At the Round Table, we were assured of the intention of the Latvian Ministry of Health that as of July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015 the new 2014 guidelines on HIV/AIDS should be adopted in the country. However, according to recent information from our Latvian partners no such move is taking place.

We, therefore, urgently call upon all responsible parties in the Cabinet of Ministers of Latvia and in the Saeima to mount an immediate and rigorous response to effectively curb the epidemic and to ensure that the Latvian treatment guidelines follow the WHO guidelines on the use of antiretroviral drugs for treating and preventing infections<sup>5</sup> that will not only reduce the burden of AIDS in Latvia, but also reduce co-morbidities, improve quality of life of people living with HIV and reduce new HIV-infections.

Yours sincerely,

Anke van Dam,  
Chair Steering Committee  
AIDS Action Europe

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<sup>5</sup> [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/104264/1/9789241506830\\_eng.pdf?ua=1](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/104264/1/9789241506830_eng.pdf?ua=1)