Recognizing that sex workers and people who use drugs are severely impacted by HIV/AIDS and have unique and valuable expertise in HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, organizers of the XIX International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2012) and our colleagues at the International Network of People who Use Drugs (INPUD) and the Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP) are working together to ensure that AIDS 2012 is as inclusive as possible of both of these communities. U.S. government restrictions on the entry of sex workers and people who use drugs into the country will make it difficult or impossible for some members of these communities to attend the conference and we are working to find the best solutions to the challenges presented by these restrictions. A previous update on progress and providing further background information was issued in June 2011 and can be found here: http://www.aids2012.org/WebContent/File/AIDS2012_Immigration_Update_22%20June.pdf.

The Working Group (WG) appointed by the Conference Coordinating Committee (CCC) 1 has been working to find ways to ensure the greatest possible inclusion of all stakeholder groups with a focus on sex workers and people who use drugs.

Current Initiatives
The WG, in conjunction with the conference secretariat, is focusing on the following initiatives:

- supporting venues for participation in the conference outside of the U.S. for those who are unable to enter the country. The CCC has granted funds to the Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP) and the International Network of People who Use Drugs (INPUD) to organize mini-conferences in other locations, called hubs, for those who are unable to attend the conference. Further details will be available soon at: http://www.aids2012.org/hubs.aspx.

- ensuring that the conference programme is fully inclusive of issues related to all affected communities including sex workers and people who use drugs. The WG made a formal request to the CCC to allocate space in the conference programme and programme activities specifically for live and pre-recorded speakers from these communities. Programme Committees 2 and Working Groups 3 have been requested to keep these issues and the related options in mind when creating their sessions.

---

1 The immigration working group is made up of one representative of the UN family (Greg Smiley); one representative of the local (U.S.) community partners, Phill Wilson; one representative of the U.S. Government, Gregorio Millett; two representatives of the international community partners, Kevin Moody (co-chairperson) and Beri Hull (co-chairperson); one representative of the IAS, Mats Ahnlund; one representative of NSWP, Ruth Morgan-Thomas; and one representative of INPUD, Jude Byrne.


3 Working Groups made up of international experts in the field are created to manage the Global Village, Youth Programme and Professional Development Workshops.
- maintaining clear and direct communications with U.S. officials about the conference registration process, the U.S. visa and waiver processes, and – once applications begin – problems faced by delegates applying for visas and waivers. The U.S. government has nominated a contact person who will support the conference secretariat by communicating to the U.S. embassies and consulates around the world and addressing country-specific and individual problems as they arise.

- advocating reduced timelines and visa application fees for conference delegates.
  - At most U.S. embassies and consulates, the wait time for a nonimmigrant visa interview is 20 working days or less. However, at posts in Brazil and China, and some other countries, the waiting list is considerably longer (e.g., 40 to 100 days in some cases). The Department of State has informed us that they cannot ask the U.S. embassies and consulates to move conference delegates to the front of the queue in terms of visa appointments. However, they will notify the embassies of the importance of the conference, and provide them with the names of the delegates who will be applying for visas. Therefore the conference will regularly share the registration database (full names, dates of birth and country of nationality) with the government. This list will then be shared with visa officers overseas so they can verify whether a particular visa applicant is or is not expected to attend the conference. Delegates are requested to submit their official letter of invitation from the conference registration department.
  - The visa fee of US$140 is designed to cover the costs of administering the visa issuances and refusals. The Department of State is unable to waive this visa application fee for conference delegates. This fee is non-refundable even if the visa application is denied.

- requesting that measures are put in place to protect information about granted waivers of grounds of admissibility from reaching an individual’s home government or other governments. The Department of State has reassured the conference that statutory law (222 F of INA) ensures that visa information is confidential and is only used for a narrow and specific set of reasons (and some narrowly defined exceptions). In addition, the Vienna declaration on privacy restricts the sharing of personal data with other governments.

- educating delegates and potential delegates about U.S. visa and waiver processes, with a special emphasis on sex workers and people who use drugs and including detailed information on the conference website and a quarterly immigration-related update.
A list of nationalities and their related visa application process and contact information is available for delegates and potential delegates to quickly identify which process and who they need to contact. Details are also given on the waiting times in order to obtain an interview and for processing: http://www.aids2012.org/Default.aspx?pageId=396.

Conference outreach partners⁴ are also available to provide information to delegates and potential delegates regarding immigration processes.

- providing all necessary conference-related documentation to registered delegates in a timely manner.
  - The registration department will provide the letter of invitation to a registered delegate as soon as the registration has been paid (or confirmed in the case of media registrations). The registration receipt will also be issued at this time. Both documents should be submitted as part of the visa application.
  - If an applicant knows that they will have problems obtaining a visa they should wait until they have all relevant documentation (scholarship award letter, speaker invitation, flight and accommodation confirmation, etc.) before applying.
  - Delegates who need to wait for the notification of their workshop, programme activity, abstract and/or scholarship application should be aware that it leaves very little time for visa processing. All applicants/submitters should ensure that they are ready to submit their visa application and schedule the interview as soon as they are accepted into the programme/for a scholarship.
  - All delegates are encouraged to apply for a visa before mid-April 2012. Those delegates from countries with longer waiting times (notably Argentina, Brazil, China, India and Venezuela) should apply in March.
  - Individuals who are professionally employed in their country of residence (e.g., scientist, official) will likely be able to qualify for visas very quickly and should apply well in advance of the conference.

Further Updates
The most up-to-date information about hubs will be posted on http://www.aids2012.org/hubs.aspx, included in the quarterly update and distributed through appropriate networks. The latest visa and immigration information will also be posted on www.aids2012.org under “Visa Information” and included in the quarterly update, which will be distributed broadly through appropriate networks and posted online.

---

⁴ Conference Outreach Partners are: ICW, ICASO, GNP+, CVC, Sidaction, WORLD-PWN, Black AIDS Institute and DC Community Coalition. More information regarding Outreach activities can be found at: http://www.aids2012.org/Default.aspx?pageId=470.