**Opening Session of the Social Forum of the Human Rights Council**

**2 October 2017 – 10:30-11:15**

**Statement of Ms. Loyce Maturu, Advocacy Officer, AFRICAID, Zimbabwe**

First of all, I would want to say I am truly humbled and honoured to be here today to represent communities of people living with HIV. Let me just say that I was once with Y+ Global Network of Young People Living with HIV, but I am now with AFRICAID, in Zimbabwe.

Let me start by saying that in 2000, when I was just 10 years old, I lost my mother and younger brother in the same week due to AIDS-related illnesses. Losing them in the same week, it was one of the most depressing and devastating moments for me as I had lost all the family members that were close to me.

In 2004, I remember the days when I started to get sick. I lost my weight and started coughing a lot. When I went with one of my aunts to the clinic, I found that I had tuberculosis and HIV. After being told the diagnosis I cried, I lost all my confidence, I lost my hope for the future and thought that I was going to die just like my mother and brother had passed away. But here I am today looking healthy and beautiful.

This is all because of the tremendous effort we have done in the past years in the fight against HIV and AIDS, so I thank you.

But we have a long way to go in the fight to win this battle. One thing that I would like to flag on is that living with HIV is something that is not easy at all, because of the stigma in the society we live, because of the distance we have to walk just to access treatment – especially for my peers living in rural areas –, the long queues that we have to wait just to access treatment because of the shortage of healthcare workers and the lack of confidentiality in health facilities.

And this calls for us to invest in evidence-based differentiated care models to make sure that AIDS is biologically suppressed and to make sure we have AIDS-free generations.

I am so excited that in the panel I have heard people talking about adolescents. And yet the adolescent age group was never a priority over the past years. It is great that now we have realised that the adolescent age group is a priority, as it has been affected mostly by the HIV epidemic.

This is because our HIV status is not discovered early, because we face a lot of stigma at school and a lot of depression. As I have been working in rural area I have seen many of my peers fail treatment, fail first-line and second-line therapies, and fail ART therapy, and this should be alarming to us.

Hence to make sure we address some of these challenges, there is a need for us to invest in peer-led interventions. Most importantly, over the past years we did not have data to see what really works and does not work for adolescents and now it calls for us to invest in research to get more data to address the challenges adolescents are facing.

Sitting here today, I am a young woman and I would like to speak more about African adolescent girls and young women. We are not given comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education. This is because of the cultural and religious beliefs that exist in our societies.

Often we are seen as children and the reality of life is never shared with us. Hence we are not fully prepared for the world and often we go wild and remain at risk of HIV and AIDS.

### When we talk a lot of 90-90-90 targets, as communities we believe it should not only be about numbers. It should not only be about giving us treatment, but also about making sure we invest into the right interventions that will support and motivate us to stay on treatment and remain AIDS-free, even when we talk about Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis for those at risk of HIV infections.

To win the fight it is now high time we start believing in our voices, making sure we are not only seen as beneficiaries but as partners and decision-makers in the fight against the HIV and AIDS epidemics.

My last words today are that as communities of people living with HIV we can help shape the way society thinks of, and responds to, HIV and AIDS only if the world gives us a chance, believes in us and creates the opportunity. And this can only start with love, because love has the power to change everything.

I thank you.