**Delivering on the leave no-one behind promise:**

**PRESENTATION by Ruth Morgan Thomas, Global Network of Sex Work Projects**

Yesterday we heard the hard truths about the impact of HIV on my community, adult sex workers. We are a diverse community of female, male and transgender sex workers intersecting with all the other key populations. We are mothers, fathers, sons and daughters, sisters and brothers, we are your neighbours and your colleagues.

We heard that female sex workers are thirteen times more likely to be infected with HIV than the general population and HIV prevalence among female sex workers in the Kingdom of Eswatini has reached 70%. We also heard that sex workers in countries that overtly criminalise sex work are eight times more likely to be infected with HIV that those in countries that do not overtly criminalise sex work.

In 2014 the Lancet special issue on sex work reported we could achive a 33-46% reduction in new infections among sex workers and our partners, if states decriminalised sex work.

Yet rather than us seeing member states working towards decriminalising sex work, we see the introduction of new laws that criminalise our clients or conflate adult sex work with trafficking.

So forgive me if I am cynical about the promise to leave no-one behind while member states continue to ignore the harms of punitive approaches and laws that violate rather than respect, protect and fulfil our human rights, and who seem married to an ideological and moral position that says sex work is inherently violence against women (even when we are men and transgender persons), and reduces us to legal minors without autonomy or agency in our own lives; that denies our right to associate and organise; that sees us locked up in protective detention for our own good; that allows perpetrators of violence and abuse to attack, rape and murder us with impunity; that fails to address and protect us from discrimination resulting in a lack of access to justice and social protection; that fails to ensure freedom from arbitrary interference in our families, homes and correspondence; that undermines our right to the highest attainable standard of physical and psychological health; that denies us the right to travel and migrate; and that fails to recognise our right to work and free choice of employment.

Yesterday I also heard a number of member states claim that there is no discrimination in their HIV response, but wherever key populations are criminalised, they are defined as outside of ‘acceptable’ society and treated differently not only in HIV services but throughout society. Whenever people are seen as outside of acceptable society they are more vulnerable to abuse and violence, which exacerbates their vulnerability to HIV.

So how can member states deliver on the leave no-one behind promise?

For my community member states must work towards:

* Decriminalise sex work, including sex workers, our clients and third parties who facilitate our work
* End the impunity of the perpetrators of abuse and violence, including by state actors
* Recognise sex work as work, and give sex workers labour protections to enable us to tackle exploitation and abuse within sex work
* See sex workers as experts in their own lives, and allow us to organise and form community-led organisation and unions
* Trust community-led data collection and the lived experiences of sex workers to inform our response to HIV

If we cannot get it right for sex worker in the global HIV response, where we carry a disproportionate burden of HIV, then how can we expect to leave no-one behind in Universal Health Coverage.

We are not expendable people and member states have an obligation to ensure our inclusion and protection.