



### **Joint Press Release: World AIDS DAY 2022**

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) joins the National AIDS Secretariat and stakeholders to commemorate World AIDS Day on December 1, 2022. Today is an opportunity to pay tribute to all the people, especially women living with HIV and AIDS.

This year's slogan "EQUALIZE" is a call for action towards the goal of ensuring that all of us work to address all forms of inequalities which affect people living with HIV and AIDS, and ensure they live in dignity and are able to enjoy their fundamental human rights and freedom. It is unfortunate that after many decades since The Gambia had her first case of HIV and AIDS, we continue to advocate for zero discrimination and stigma against people infected and affected by HIV AIDS, and the creation of an equal, inclusive society for all.

People living with HIV and AIDS in The Gambia continue to face challenges accessing their right to health care services due to stigma and discrimination, despite the enactment of the HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Act 2015. The Commission on Human Rights in its 2001 resolution recognized *the right to the highest attainable standard of health includes access to antiretroviral therapy for HIV*. Respecting, protecting, and fulfilling the human rights of persons living with HIV and AIDS are integral to the creation of an equal society. Thus, it is important that all stakeholders reflect the human rights dimensions of access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support in all their programmes, and in our laws and policies.

To fulfil its obligations towards persons living with HIV and AID and create an equal and inclusive society, we call on the Government to:

- Accelerate reforms of laws and policies, and ensure their effective enforcement and implementation, to tackle the stigma and exclusion faced by people living with HIV and by key and marginalized populations, so that everyone is treated with respect and dignity.
- Develop, as recommended in the Government White Paper on the TRRC Report, HIV and AIDS programmes and strategies to improve equitable access to quality HIV treatment, testing, care, and support services.
- Promote and popularize the "Equalize" message to highlight the particular inequalities people living with HIV and AIDS face and to press for the actions needed to address them through the media.
- Provide the National AIDS Secretariat with the necessary resources to be able to effectively implement its mandate.

All in all, we call on the Government to take the necessary measures, in compliance with its commitments under the various ratified international and regional instruments, to effectively protect the rights of people living with HIV and AIDS. We can only have a better society when everyone lives in dignity and is valued as an equal member.