Leaving no one behind

Africa is leading the world in trying to end the HIV public health threat, but we cannot do it alone, writes former Botswana president HE Festus Mogae

In the week before World AIDS Day, which takes place every year on 1st December, HE Joaquim Chissano, former President of Mozambique, and I visited London and the UK Parliament to represent Champions for an AIDS-Free Generation in Africa.

The purpose of our visit was to call on lawmakers to “leave no one behind” in the fight to eradicate HIV and AIDS. We were hosted by the Royal Commonwealth Society, met with the Equality and Justice Alliance and joined the All Party Parliamentary Group on HIV/AIDS as it led the World AIDS Day commemorations. We also met with leading Commonwealth parliamentarians attending the annual Westminster Seminar on Effective Parliaments organised by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK where we advocated for the elimination of stigma and discrimination.

I was elected President of Botswana in 1998, four years after HIV was formally identified. The impact of the AIDS pandemic in Botswana was devastating and I used the platform I had to stem the spread of HIV. We had made a lot of progress and there were fewer deaths and funerals by the time I left office in 2008, but I was concerned that complacency would trigger a rise in numbers again. Therefore I brought together a group of former presidents and influential African leaders to advocate for the prevention of HIV and an end to AIDS. We call ourselves Champions for an AIDS-Free Generation in Africa and we aim to engender action and secure the human rights of key minority populations to guarantee the health for all.

During the course of our work, we are privileged to meet leading parliamentarians at forums such as the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association’s Westminster Seminar in the UK Parliament. We use these platforms to advocate for better laws, practices and public healthcare access. We urge the parliamentarians we meet to respect and care for all groups, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation, and provide equitable access to healthcare and medication, condoms, and public health information. While stigma and discrimination still exist, these minority groups will not receive the healthcare they need and Africa will never be HIV-free.

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HE Festus Mogae is the former President of Botswana and chairperson of Champions for an AIDS-Free Generation in Africa. To read more about the Champions for an AIDS-Free Generation or their partner organisation The Royal Commonwealth Society, please visit http://www.aidsfreecampaign.org/ and https://www.thercs.org/. To read more about the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK and the Westminster Seminar, please visit https://www.uk-cpa.org/.