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**To:**

Marina Sachek, Director of the State Institution “Republican Scientific and Practical Center for Medical Technologies, Information, Management and Health Economics” (RSPC MT) of the Republic of Belarus

Irina Novik, Deputy Director, RSPC MT

Tatiana Makarevich, Head of the Grant Management Department for Global Fund projects, RSPC MT

Vladimir Karanik, Minister of Health of the Republic of Belarus

Peter Sands, Executive Director, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria

Valeria Grishechkina, Grant Portfolio Manager, Secretariat of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria

**Date:**

**October 7, 2019**

**Open Letter**

With this letter, we, the representatives of civil society, communities affected by HIV and tuberculosis, as well as professional communities working in the field of combating the three diseases in different countries of the world, express our profound concern as to the actions of the leadership team and employees of the Republican Scientific and Practical Center for Medical Technologies, Information, Management and Health Economics (RSPC MT) - the organization that is the Principal Recipient of Global Fund grants in the Republic of Belarus - in relation to Yekaterina Parfenyuk, a current member of the Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM) of the Republic of Belarus for collaboration with the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, in representing the interests of the community of people who inject drugs and people living with HIV<sup>1</sup>.

We condemn the prosecution of Yekaterina Parfenyuk by the RPTC MT and the accusation that she has damaged the business reputation of the RPTC MT owing to her open letter addressed to the RSPC MT and the Global Fund in which she expressed the assumption that the situation related to the provision of medicines in Belarus is problematic and that there are interruptions in the supply of the anti-TB drug ‘Bedaquiline’.

Firstly, we would like to remind the RSPC MT staff that representatives of civil society and communities living with, or affected by, the three diseases were at the birth of the Global Fund. It was the joint efforts of thousands of civil society representatives around the world who advocated for increasing

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<sup>1</sup> More details on the case of Yekaterina Parfenyuk can be read here <https://bit.ly/2n5xzG3>.



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resources to the fight against HIV that led to the creation of the Global Fund in 2002. Since then, representatives of communities and civil society as a whole have played an active and significant role at all levels of the Global Fund, from the development of the Fund's strategy, policies and programs to their implementation, and, along with representatives of government bodies, have taken part in the work of the Global Fund's governing bodies<sup>2</sup>. Protecting human rights, gender equality, ensuring meaningful participation of key populations and the strengthening of community systems are key elements of the Global Fund's 2017–2022 strategy.

Secondly, we would like to recall that representatives of public organizations and civil society play an important role in monitoring the activities of government agencies, helping to ensure the transparency of their activities and accountability to citizens. Support for the actions of community representatives in implementing the response to the HIV epidemic is also enshrined in the 2016 Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS<sup>3</sup>, which has been signed by the Republic of Belarus. The Global Fund, whose main beneficiary in the Republic of Belarus is the RSPC MT, actively supports community-based initiatives to implement patient control and monitoring of the provision of HIV and tuberculosis services. Therefore, we consider the actions of the RSPC MT in relation to Yekaterina Parfenyuk as unacceptable and discriminatory, based on the fact that as a representative of the patient community, she has simply tried to gain access to the information she was interested in regarding the implementation of the grant program using ways available to her and, in response, she received a subpoena.

If, by suing an HIV-positive woman and the mother of a young child and who represents the interests of people who use drugs on the CCM, the RPRC MT - according to the claimants statement - wanted to maintain its business reputation, then, in our opinion, it is difficult to come up with anything worse to defame its reputation among representatives of civil society, the professional community, as well as representatives of communities affected by HIV. In its judicial persecution of representatives of the communities in whose interests it should work within the framework of programs implemented with the support of the Global Fund only because uncomfortable questions are asked about the implementation of these programs, the question raised is to what extent such an agency meets the requirements as the Principal Recipient of Global Fund grants in the country, and we address this issue primarily to the Global Fund Secretariat.

By their actions, employees of the RSPC MT have created a situation whereby other representatives of key populations and affected communities in the Republic of Belarus may be limited in their access to information that is of vital importance to them in the context of the implementation of the Global Fund grants in the country, fearing that they will be sued in court or will be prosecuted or discriminated against in some way. Such actions of the Principal Recipient of the Global Fund grant can set a precedent not only for Belarus, but also for other countries implementing Global Fund grants,

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<sup>2</sup> More information about the position of the Global Fund on the role of representatives of civil society and communities in the activities of the Fund can be found at <https://www.theglobalfund.org/en/civil-society/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/documents/2016/2016-political-declaration-HIV-AIDS>



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having a negative impact on the development of community systems, community monitoring and, in general, on the sustainability of the response to the HIV epidemic and tuberculosis in these countries. We consider this situation unacceptable and urge the management and staff of the RSPC MT to change their attitude towards representatives of communities of people living with, and affected by, HIV and tuberculosis. We urge the RSPC MT to abandon all claims against Yekaterina Parfenyuk.

We hope that the Global Fund Secretariat, as well as the Office of the Global Fund's Inspector General, will pay due attention to the current situation and actions of the Principal Recipient of Global Fund grants in the Republic of Belarus in relation to the representative of the communities, and take appropriate measures in relation to the RSPC MT in order to avoid a repetition of such a situation in the future and to stop attempts at judicial proceedings by state institutions against representatives of civil society rather than building a constructive dialogue as seen in other countries of the region.

With respect,

Eurasian Harm Reduction Association (EHRA)	Eurasian Women’s Network on AIDS (EWNA)
Eurasian Network of People Who Use Drugs (ENPUD)	Eurasian Union of Adolescents and Youth “Teenergizer”
East Europe and Central Asia Union of People Living with HIV (ECUO)	Sex Workers’ Rights Advocacy Network (SWAN)
AFEW International	