Amplifying trans voices at UNAIDS: A new era of advocacy at TGEU

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Written by Amanita Calderón-Cifuentes, HIV Research and Advocacy Officer, Trans Europe and Central Asia (TGEU).

It is with immense honour and gratitude that I begin my role as the NGO delegate for Europe at the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board (PCB), representing civil society from January 2025 to December 2026, with the possibility of extending to 2027. This moment represents a historic opportunity—not just for me, but for trans communities everywhere. I carry the weight of this responsibility with humility and determination, knowing that our voices and experiences must drive the global HIV response.

Carrying a legacy of leadership

I step into this space standing on the shoulders of giants. Leaders such as **Erika Castellanos, Cecilia Chung,** and **Dinah Bons** have paved the way for trans representation at UNAIDS. Their tireless advocacy has not only amplified our voices but also demonstrated the transformative power of trans leadership in shaping global health policies.

Their work reminds me that representation is about much more than simply having a seat at the table. It's about using that position to fight for the dignity, rights, and wellbeing of our communities. I'm honoured to continue their mission and ensure that trans people, particularly those most marginalised, remain central to the global HIV response.

Trans representation is transformative

For far too long, trans people, especially those at the intersections of multiple forms of marginalisation, have been excluded from decision-making spaces. This invisibility has perpetuated systemic inequalities, fueling the HIV epidemic in our communities. My presence at UNAIDS is not symbolic; it is a necessary step to bring real expertise and transformative change.

We're not just the ones with lived experience — we're the experts. Many of us have educated and prepared ourselves to occupy these spaces, blending policy, research, and medical expertise with our lived realities. These experiences guide the professional work we do and help us craft informed, effective solutions. My role is to ensure that trans voices are not only heard but that our voices actively shape policies and programs to address the realities we face, especially those in the **EECA region**.

The urgency of this work is undeniable. Trans feminine people face a **66 times higher risk** of contracting HIV compared to the general population. Trans masculine people, though vastly understudied, are estimated to have a **6.8 times higher risk**. Yet, trans masculine people remain largely invisible in HIV research and advocacy, further perpetuating inequities in care and prevention.

Rooted in marginalised communities

While my role as a delegate is to represent civil society broadly, my heart and advocacy are rooted in the realities of the most marginalised among us:

- **Trans sex workers** who face compounded stigma and criminalisation
- **Trans people who use drugs** who navigate systemic barriers to care due to punitive laws and prejudice
- **Trans migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers** who endure systemic exclusion and xenophobia
- **Black, Indigenous, and trans people of colour** who face intersecting oppressions of racism, xenophobia and transphobia.

As an HIV-positive Colombian Indigenous Muisca, two-spirit trans woman, sex worker, drug user, long-time human rights activist and molecular microbiologist, I bring my personal and professional journey into this work, along with the stories of my siblings whose resilience inspires me every day.

A bold agenda for change

Ending the HIV epidemic requires urgent, coordinated action. In this role, I will advocate for:

1. **Human rights protections** for key populations, such as improved access to trans-specific healthcare, legal gender recognition, and protective laws to reduce HIV risk.
2. **Affordable access** to lifesaving HIV prevention and treatment technologies like PrEP and antiretrovirals.
3. **Integrated services** including harm reduction, mental health care, and reproductive health services.
4. **Decriminalisation** of queer and trans identities, and sex work globally.
5. **Challenging anti-gender and anti-rights movements** that undermine progress in health equity and human rights.

This role marks the beginning of a new chapter in the advocacy we do at TGEU. Together, we can build a world where trans people and all marginalised communities are not just surviving but thriving. Ending HIV is about much more than healthcare—it's about social justice, dignity, and equity for all.

To all my trans siblings: We see you. We hear you. TGEU is here for you—always.