

Africa-wide campaign calls for effective HIV treatment

30 October 2015

Today a new campaign is launched calling on African governments to make viral load tests routinely available to all citizens living with HIV. A month ahead of World AIDS Day 2015, the campaign '**Be Healthy – Know your viral load**' is coordinated by the International Treatment Preparedness Coalition (ITPC), the AIDS and Rights Alliance for Southern Africa (ARASA) and 11 national partners from across Africa: Botswana, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Malawi, Morocco, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The World Health Organization (WHO) strongly recommends routine viral load testing, as an essential part of effective HIV treatment. While many countries in the region have adopted the WHO guidelines, the tests are not widely available in 10 out of the 11 countries involved in the campaign.

The start of the campaign will be marked by a march on 30 October in Lusaka, Zambia. Joining the march will be people living with HIV, treatment advocates and representatives from many of the participating countries. Together they will deliver a letter to the Secretariat of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Zambian Ministry of Health and Foreign Ambassadors. They will also use this opportunity to launch a petition calling on all African governments to:

- Adopt the 2013 WHO guidelines on the strategic use of routine viral load tests;
- Invest in the direct and strategic implementation of the guidelines that recommend the use of routine viral load testing;
- Invest in fast tracking policy implementation of the routine viral load testing guidelines at health care facility level.

BE HEALTHY

KNOW YOUR **VIRAL LOAD**

“I was advised to go for a viral load test,” explains London Chuma, from Kafue, Zambia. “They said there was more than 1000 copies of the virus in my blood. After that they changed my medicine. If I didn’t have the viral load test I am sure I wouldn’t be here today.” London’s story is shared in two short films to coincide with the launch of the campaign.

“Many governments across Africa have adopted the WHO guidelines for routine viral load testing,” explains Christine Stegling, Executive Director of ITPC. “But the reality on the ground for the vast majority of people living with HIV is that routine viral load testing is simply not available. The right to health, includes the right to know if your treatment is working.”

“Viral load monitoring is the most efficient way people can be sure their treatment is working,” explains Michaela Clayton, Director of ARASA. “It is essential now that government’s stop dragging their feet and make routine viral load testing available to all their citizens living with HIV. It will not only improve health and save lives, but it will save money in the long term.”

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Launch events in Lusaka, Zambia will include

29 October 2015: 07.30 – 10.00 A media and partner briefing on the campaign at the Best Western Plus Lusaka Grand Hotel

30 October 2015: 09.00 March from the Freedom Statue to the Lusaka Civic Centre

The media briefing on 29 October 2015 in Lusaka, Zambia will include:

- A 6 minute film showing the impact and benefits of viral load testing for two people living with HIV, London Chuma from Zambia and Doreen Nasaala from Uganda.
- Briefings from ARASA, ITPC and Treatment Advocacy and Literacy Campaign (TALC).
- Personal testimony from London Chuma.

