OPEN LETTER TO THE LEADERSHIP OF THE INTERNATIONAL AIDS SOCIETY

On the inclusion of the "America First Global Health Strategy" in the AIDS 2026 pre-conference programme

Dear President Beatriz Grinsztejn,
Dear Executive Director Birgit Poniatowski,
Dear members of the IAS Governing Council,

We are writing as representatives of HIV community organizations, advocates, clinicians, researchers and IAS members to express our deep concern about the inclusion, in the official AIDS 2026 pre-conference programme, of an entire morning devoted to implementing the U.S. Government's "America First Global Health Strategy."

The three sessions are structured as institutional presentations of bilateral agreements, implementation plans, financing and governance. The published programme does not provide an evident space for critical examination or meaningful confrontation with communities, researchers, health workers or people affected by the consequences of recent U.S. policies.

Our concern is not whether a government has the right to explain its policies. It is whether the IAS should grant those policies the visibility, credibility and institutional legitimacy of the world's leading HIV conference. The fact that externally organized pre-conferences may be purchased explains how an event enters the programme; it does not answer why the IAS considers it compatible with its mission and values.

The "America First Global Health Strategy" marks a deliberate shift from multilateral cooperation and collective responsibility towards bilateral, transactional relationships centred on U.S. national interests. Countries whose health systems have depended heavily on U.S. funding are being asked to negotiate individually with the same government that abruptly suspended or dismantled programmes on which their populations relied. Calling these arrangements "partnerships" does not eliminate that imbalance.

The consequences are already evident: disruption of HIV prevention, testing, treatment, surveillance, research and community-based services; programme closures; job losses among health and community workers; and growing uncertainty over access to essential care. Scientific publications warn that these policies may reverse decades of progress in the global HIV response. [4–11]

For these reasons, this pre-conference cannot be regarded as a neutral technical event. It offers an official platform to a political strategy that is eroding multilateralism, scientific independence, international solidarity, equity, human rights and meaningful community participation—the principles on which the global HIV response has been built.

This is especially difficult to reconcile with the theme of AIDS 2026, "Rethink. Rebuild. Rise." Rebuilding means repairing the damage caused by the dismantling of services and research, protecting community-led organizations and defending health as a right, not as an instrument of geopolitical negotiation.

We therefore respectfully ask the IAS leadership:

- to explain publicly how the inclusion of this pre-conference is compatible with the mission, values and ethical responsibilities of the IAS;
- to clarify the criteria used to assess externally organized and funded pre-conferences;

- to ensure that AIDS 2026 includes a genuine and visible confrontation with affected communities, researchers, health workers and civil society;
- to review its policies for future conferences so that financial participation can never replace ethical and institutional accountability.

The global HIV response has always depended not only on scientific excellence, but on solidarity and the willingness to challenge political power when lives, rights and scientific progress are placed at risk. The platforms granted by the IAS are themselves political and ethical choices, for which the Society must be prepared to take responsibility.

Respectfully,

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