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## PRESS RELEASE

### **A Call for Equality and Empowerment this World AIDS Day**

*Celebrities, government and activists to show support for Pehchān programme to strengthen the HIV prevention in MSM, transgender and hijra communities in India*

**New Delhi:** This year, as the Indian response to HIV/AIDS marks a quarter century, the spotlight is on marginalised groups most impacted by the epidemic. On the eve of World AIDS Day, the Pehchān programme will call for continued and expanded efforts to protect and support men who have sex with men (MSM), transgenders and *hijras* in India. In a major event at the New Delhi YMCA, Pehchān will mark the progress that has been made in addressing HIV in these populations and highlight the need for sustained investment and support. More than 200 people including television personalities, activists, policy makers, and people living with HIV will participate, sharing their experiences and showing their support for the cause.

The theme for World AIDS Day 2011 is *Getting to Zero: Zero New HIV Infections, Zero Discrimination and Zero AIDS-related Deaths*. Reflecting this global goal, the event will present speeches, cultural performances by community members and the launch of a new set of Pehchān advocacy posters. The evening will also include the staging of a short dramatic piece that describes a mother's discovery of her son's homosexuality.

Initiated in 2010, Pehchān is implemented by India HIV/AIDS Alliance and a consortium of partners including Humsafar Trust, Maan AIDS Foundation, SAATHII, Sangama, and SIAAP. Working through robust partnerships with the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) and the State AIDS Control Societies (SACS), the programme is building the capacity of 200 community-based organisations to provide HIV prevention programming for more than 4,50,000 MSM, transgenders and *hijras* in 17 Indian states. Funded by the Global Fund, Pehchān is their largest single-country grant to date focused on the HIV response for vulnerable and underserved sexual minorities.

James Robertson, India HIV/AIDS Alliance Country Director, said, "Pehchān's World AIDS Day event is an opportunity for us to unite and renew our commitment to stopping new HIV infections. MSM, transgender and *hijra* communities are disproportionately affected by the epidemic and yet are still often neglected. While India has put high-risk groups at the heart of its national HIV prevention strategy, the Pehchān programme is ensuring that communities have the capacity to take up this charge."

The prominent gay rights activist Ashok Row Kavi continued, "NACO has supported the development of Pehchān to strengthen government efforts to prevent HIV and protect health in MSM, transgender and *hijra* communities. We hope that this shared and collective effort that will spread to other government sectors and to society at large in India and beyond."

Sonal Mehta, Director of Policy & Programmes at India HIV/AIDS Alliance, concluded, "In spite of the reading down of Section 377 in 2009, MSM, transgenders or *hijras* remain stigmatized and outside the mainstream. Even as Pehchān empowers these groups,

intolerance and discrimination against them continues and must end. While headway has been made, the journey to equality is not over. ”

**About India HIV/AIDS Alliance:**

The India HIV/AIDS Alliance (Alliance India) is a diverse partnership that brings together committed organisations and communities to support sustained responses to HIV in India. Complementing the Indian national programme, we work through capacity building, knowledge sharing, technical support and advocacy. Through our network of partners, Alliance India supports the delivery of effective, innovative, community-based HIV programmes to key populations affected by the epidemic.

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