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PRESS RELEASE

Hijras advocate for equality, celebrate *Hijra Habba*

In a national event organized by Pehchan, hijras highlight discrimination and demand equality for their community

New Delhi: Stakeholders from government, media, policy bodies, the transgender and *hijra* community, and civil society came together today for the first National Hijra Habba. The event was organised by Pehchan, a five-year programme that strengthens and builds the capacity of 200 community-based organizations in 17 states to advance HIV prevention. The national consultation discussed efforts to achieve equality for transgenders and *hijras* and drew attention to the significant challenges faced by these communities.

Addressing the event, Gauri Sawant, General Secretary, Transgender and Hijra Welfare Board, Maharashtra said: "In India, cases of violence go unreported as the present social and legal environment is oppressive towards transgender persons and *hijras*. Due to their different gender identity, they are denied opportunities to earn a living, to study, and to access health services. Even changing their names and sex in official documents is not easy."

Pehchan collaborates with India's National AIDS Control Programme and reaches 453,750 MSM, transgenders and *hijras* by 2015 and is the Global Fund's largest single-country grant to date focused on the HIV response for vulnerable sexual minorities.

Held at Vishwa Yuvak Kendra, the Hijra Habba included speeches, experience sharing and community performances by leaders from transgender and *hijra* community. In-depth discussions were held on issues including social entitlements, legal status, violence, economic vulnerabilities, and feminization.

At the heart of the event was the development of an action plan for advocacy for the next three years on priority issues for these communities. Ms. Aradhana Johri, Additional Secretary, National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO), affirmed the importance of these populations to the national HIV prevention strategy and acknowledged the need for continued effort to control the epidemic among transgenders and *hijras*.

According to James Robertson, Country Director, India HIV/AIDS Alliance, "India has been a global leader in defining an effective HIV prevention response for transgenders and *hijras*. The world has much to learn from this example. While progress has been made, the journey towards equality for transgenders and *hijras* is not yet 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 a sustained response to HIV in India. Complementing the national programme in India, it works 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 groups affected by the epidemic.

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