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## PRESS RELEASE

### **Pehchān welcomes Government of India stand on the decriminalisation of homosexuality**

**New Delhi:** Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Indians welcome the stand taken by the government in the Supreme Court on the decriminalisation of homosexuality. Attorney-general G. E. Vahanvati's statement on March 21, 2012, has generated both relief and hope that the court will affirm the Delhi High Court's ruling in July 2009 reading down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code and decriminalising homosexuality in India.

The Pehchān programme welcomes the government's position and is hopeful that the Attorney-general's statement will further contribute to increased responsiveness to the concerns of sexual minorities and greater understanding of diversity in gender and sexuality.

Ashok Row Kavi, Convenor, the Indian Networks for Sexual Minorities (INFOSEM), said, "The lack of clarity in the Government stand has contributed to both confusion in the public mind and problems in sexual minority communities. Section 377 was used to threaten, extort and blackmail sexual minorities and led to stigma and discrimination that limited their access to health facilities and other entitlements as citizens of India."

Pehchān fully backs efforts to ensure full and appropriate access by sexual minorities to health services, as part of efforts to complement NACO's HIV prevention efforts for these communities.

Sonal Mehta, Director of Policy and Programmes at Alliance India, continued, "Even as MSM, transgenders and *hijras* achieve legal full rights as citizens, intolerance and discrimination against them continue. In spite of the reading down of Section 377 in 2009, members of these groups remain stigmatised and outside of the mainstream. While headway has been made, the journey to equality is not over."

#### **About Pehchān**

Implemented by a consortium of India HIV/AIDS Alliance, Humsafar Trust, SAATHII, SIAAP and Sangama, Pehchān is a five-year programme in 17 Indian states that builds the capacity of 200 CBOs to serve as effective HIV prevention partners with the National AIDS Control Programme (NACO). By 2015, it will reach more than 450,000 MSM, transgenders and *hijras* using a community-driven and rights-based approach. Supported by the Global Fund, Pehchān is their largest single-country grant to date focused on the HIV response for vulnerable and underserved sexual minorities.

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