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## UN slams penalty for gays in 80 countries

**NEW YORK:** Some 80 countries still penalise homosexuals, including passing criminal laws that fuel discrimination against them, the joint United Nations programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS) said Tuesday. On World AIDS Day, UNAIDS said that such laws have prevented effective national responses to help those living with HIV and are a violation of their human rights.

World AIDS Day is held annually on Dec 1. It cited the decision by the Delhi High Court in India for striking down an anti-sodomy law penalising men who have sex with men, as an example of government intervention to build support for human rights and allow healthcare treatment to HIV patients.

"UNAIDS calls for all governments to protect their citizens from discrimination, denial of healthcare, harassment, or violence based on health status or sexual orientation and gender identity," the group said.

Michel Sidibe, UNAIDS executive director, said the gay community has been in the forefront of the global

fight against AIDS and attacks against the gay community would affect access to health-care by those infected.

"As a social movement, the gay community changed AIDS from simply another disease to an issue of justice, dignity, security and human rights," Sidibe said.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said progress has been made to reverse the AIDS epidemic in some countries, but respect for human rights could lead to greater advances.

He called on governments to remove punitive laws, policies and practices that get in the way of the AIDS response.

"On this World AIDS Day, let us uphold the human rights of all people living with HIV, people at risk of infection, and children and families affected by the epidemic," he said.

The UN has called for halting and reversing the AIDS epidemic by 2015.

According to the latest estimate from UNAIDS, there are currently 33 million people living with HIV, with 2.7 million new infections in 2008 and two million deaths. - dpa