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## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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23 September 2009

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Venezuela: Treatment by government officials of persons with HIV/AIDS, in particular with regard to the distribution of anti-retroviral drugs; treatment by government officials of gay men with HIV/AIDS  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Information on the treatment by government officials of persons with HIV/AIDS was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. However, the United States (US) Department of State *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2008* states that "according to the NGO Citizen Action Against AIDS, persons diagnosed with HIV/AIDS... often were refused access to government health services" (25 Feb. 2009, Sec. 5). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

With regard to the distribution of anti-retroviral drugs, a report by the Venezuelan government states that anti-retroviral drugs have been universally available at no cost to HIV/AIDS patients since 1998 (2004, 55; see also Venezuela n.d.). An official with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) Venezuela corroborated that anti-retroviral drugs are available universally "without any distinctions" (3 Sept. 2009). A Caracas-based lawyer specializing in gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) issues corroborated that anti-retroviral drugs are free for HIV/AIDS patients (21 Aug. 2009). A statement by the Venezuelan Ministry of Health notes that Caracas-based patients registered in a national AIDS program run by the Ministry of Health may bring their prescription with them to a medication-related service centre between 8:00 am and 4:00 pm in order to receive one month's treatment (n.d.). In rural areas, a coordinator delivers anti-retroviral drugs to hospitals (Venezuela n.d.). In cases where a person's location represents a challenge, drugs are delivered to the appropriate municipality (ibid.). According to the Lawyer, the provision of anti-retroviral drugs "works reasonably well, although sometimes drugs are not available..." (21 Aug. 2009).

A representative of Acción Solidaria (ACSOL), a Caracas-based non-profit organization founded in October 1995 to address HIV/AIDS issues (ACSOL n.d.), provided the following information in correspondence with the Research Directorate:

The provision of drugs by the Venezuelan government works well in general. There are good doctors in many centers and sensible health personnel. This has taken time and many initiatives regarding the rights of people with HIV carried out by our organizations. We still see situations of discrimination, mistreatment, particularly, once again, in cases in which homosexuality might be "evident". We usually refer gays or transgendered persons with HIV to centers in which we know that there are sensible people.

...

I could not say that all people with HIV, especially gay men with HIV, face discrimination, but many, many more than one would like, even after almost 30 years of the beginnings of HIV, are still subjected to discrimination and violations of their rights. (ACSOL Representative 18 Aug. 2009)

The UNAIDS Official stated that some individuals who are transgender or exhibit more feminine qualities face "degrading and offensive treatment by ... health workers" and that the Venezuelan government has not acted to decrease such practices (3 Sept. 2009).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

### References

Acción Solidaria (ACSOL). 18 August 2009. Correspondence with a representative.

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United States (US). 25 February 2009. "Venezuela." *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2008*. <<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/wha/119177.htm>> [Accessed 17 Aug. 2009]

Venezuela. 2004. Gabinete Social. "Cumpliendo las Metas del Milenio." (ACCSI) <[http://www.accsi.org.ve/PDF/INforme\\_gob\\_Venezuela\\_2004\\_Metas\\_Milenio.pdf](http://www.accsi.org.ve/PDF/INforme_gob_Venezuela_2004_Metas_Milenio.pdf)> [Accessed 31 Aug. 2009]

\_\_\_\_\_. N.d. Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Salud. "Abastecimiento Total de Medicamentos para Pacientes con VIH/SIDA." <<http://www.msds.gov.ve/ms/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=587>> [Accessed 27 Aug. 2009]

#### Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources:** Attempts to contact representatives of Acción Ciudadana Contra el SIDA (ACCSI), Alianza Lambda de Venezuela, Asesoría en educación y salud de Venezuela (ASES), Movimiento Gay Revolucionario de Venezuela and the World Health Organization (WHO) Collaborating Centre on HIV/AIDS Vaccine Research and Development were unsuccessful. Representatives of the Center for HIV/AIDS Vaccine Immunology (CHAVI) at Duke University and the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) were unable to provide information.

**Internet sites, including:** Amnesty International (AI), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme (FIDH), Freedom House, *Gay Times*, GlobalGayz.com, Human Rights Watch (HRW), Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Pink Triangle Trust, Refworld, Sodomy Laws, U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), World Health Organization (WHO).

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