

# AIDSLEX: Sharing knowledge on HIV, the law and human rights

DAVID COZAC



## 1 Issues

Despite widespread rhetorical support for rights-centred approaches to addressing HIV/AIDS, much remains to be done to safeguard the human rights of people living with and most affected by the disease. Many of these challenges have been met over the years with varying success by organizations of people living with HIV/AIDS, advocates and policy-makers relying on legal and human rights analysis and policy research. In some cases, such research and analysis have informed policy debates and improved AIDS-related human rights protections and access to human rights-friendly programs.

However, there has been a void on the Internet for a resource that provides up-to-date and relevant information and knowledge on HIV, the law and human rights. The absence of a centralized portal for analysis, research, legislation and caselaw can be a challenge for the work of advocates and policy-makers, particularly those who need these documents but who lack the time or resources to find them.

## 3 Lessons learned

AIDSLEX answers the need for a source of high-quality information on HIV, the law and human rights. However, because of the topical nature of certain issues and the often changing dynamic involving jurisprudence, advocacy and the drafting of policy and legislation, AIDSLEX must be responsive and adaptable. It will work to ensure its ongoing relevance, not least through support from the community of users, who will be increasingly involved in sustaining the website.

Time is needed to develop a committed and large base of users following the launch of a Web resource like AIDSLEX. Achieving user “buy-in” and making it the default place for research and information-sharing on HIV and human rights is something that cannot occur in the short-term.

AIDSLEX has come to value the role that other organizations working on similar issues can play. To that end, we plan to devote more energy to reaching out to them in order to support our own work and developing the site’s features so that AIDSLEX becomes the most useful, pertinent resource available to activists, policy-makers, academics and others from around the world.

## 2 Description

Over one year in planning and development, the AIDS and Law Exchange (AIDSLEX) website launched in October 2009 under the direction of the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network. Support during the process was provided by an international steering committee composed of experts on HIV, the law, human rights and Internet communications technology.

AIDSLEX gives concrete meaning to a rights-based approach to HIV/AIDS. The website, the impetus for which emerged during a pre-conference satellite meeting at AIDS 2006, is fully functional in English, French, Spanish and Russian. It helps people around the world communicate and share information, materials and strategies in order to protect and promote the human rights of people living with or vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. It does this primarily through an electronic library of documentation: close to 3000 items — and growing — that include jurisprudence, legislation, literature reviews, reports, discussion papers, briefing notes, best practices and declarations. AIDSLEX also provides information and recommended readings on fifteen key areas of HIV and human rights as well as technical support that connects users with recognized legal, policy and research experts from around the world.

## 4 Next steps

In order to expand its reach and scope, AIDSLEX will introduce new language capabilities in Chinese and Arabic, and incorporate more interactive components (including Wiki pages) so that users become more proactive in building the site, keeping it timely and ultimately taking ownership of the resource.

► [www.aidslex.org](http://www.aidslex.org)

### Contact

David Cozac  
AIDSLEX Coordinator  
[dcozac@aidslaw.ca](mailto:dcozac@aidslaw.ca)

Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network  
1240 Bay Street, Suite 600  
Toronto, Ontario  
Canada M5R 2A7  
Telephone: +1 416 595-1666  
[www.aidslaw.ca](http://www.aidslaw.ca)

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