



Iris House Statement on News Reporting and HIV/AIDS Confidentiality

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Many of you have seen recent news reports of an alleged sexual assault by the former head of the International Monetary Fund. A Grand Jury has taken testimony from witnesses, including the hotel worker who made the accusations, and we hope and expect the justice system will resolve this criminal matter based on the merits of the case.

I'm taking this opportunity to communicate with you because we have been deeply disturbed by certain reports in the media concerning the alleged victim. Specifically, an article in the *New York Post*, published Wednesday and now picked up in other media, reported that the hotel worker lives in housing for individuals with HIV or AIDS. This prompted the alleged victim's lawyer to deny the *Post's* story, which also has been criticized sharply by organizations such as The National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS.

We vehemently concur with this criticism. The *Post's* reporting is highly irresponsible and a not-so-subtle attack on the dignity of our community. The alleged victim's HIV status is completely irrelevant (and presumably inadmissible) to the Grand Jury investigation. Speculation about this woman's HIV/AIDS status appears to represent an effort to mitigate the seriousness of the alleged crime, while simultaneously diminishing the credibility of this individual.

Most importantly, the article represents a violation in itself, a possible invasion of privacy that we must condemn forcefully. Confidentiality for all persons infected with and affected by HIV/AIDS must be maintained without exception. Anything less undermines the efforts of all organizations, such as Iris House, working on behalf of the community. The recent coverage sets a poor precedent and means that we must demonstrate more than ever our commitment to preserve the integrity of people living with the illness.

We expect better from the media and are bitterly disappointed. At the least, the *Post* should provide an apology for this reckless reporting. Certainly, we will continue to monitor this situation closely.

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