

Jamaica AIDS Support applauds Obama

Jamaica AIDS Support for Life (JASL) has welcomed a move by United States President Barack Obama to end a 22-year-old ban on persons who have tested positive for HIV from entering that country.

"We are ecstatic about it," said Stacy-Ann Jarrett, executive director of JASL. "It actually speaks to addressing the issue of universal access to all of our target groups, to persons who are living with AIDS."

She added: "It is the beginning of things to happen in terms of non-discrimination, the inclusion of HIV-positive people."

Obama had promised to end the ban before the end of the year, but said a rule cancelling the ban would be published on Tuesday and take effect early next year.

Once lifted, foreigners applying to become residents in the United States will no longer be required to take a test for AIDS.

Ending the stigma

According to The Associated Press, "Obama said that by lifting the ban, the US will take a step toward ending the stigma against people with HIV/AIDS, something he said has stopped people from getting tested and has helped spread the disease."

Meanwhile, Jarrett noted that there were several benefits awaiting HIV-positive persons who want to travel to the United States. Among those benefits were opportunities to visit family and attend international conferences.

The JASL head noted that conference organisers have, in the past, had to re-route people through other territories, costing more money than if they were able to stop over in the US.

"It's going to cost less to participate in international conferences or meetings and other support group sessions that are made to empower persons who are living with the virus all over the world," Jarrett explained.

Jarrett said people would now have easier access to drugs and diagnostic tests that are not readily available in Jamaica.

Now that one stepping stone has been laid, Jarrett is looking forward, noting that people who were HIV-positive were not able to access health coverage or health insurance plans.

"The next step that we are anticipating is for insurance companies to start having more policies geared at supporting persons who are living with HIV and AIDS," she said.