

MALAWI: Malawi Sex Workers Sue Government After Forced HIV Test

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Fourteen Malawian prostitutes are suing the government after being forced to undergo HIV testing as part of their arrest process, a high court official in the administrative capital Lilongwe said Sunday. When the women were arrested for prostitution in 2009, the police officer handling the case and a district health officer for Mwanza in southern Malawi "subjected us to a forced HIV test without our informed consent ... this decision was illegal," according to the sex workers' affidavits. A magistrate court in Mwanza "publicly disclosed in a court room the results of our mandatory HIV tests, thereby violating our right to privacy and dignity," they said. A judicial review was filed the year of the women's arrest, but the court only gave consent to proceed this year, according to the official.

The prostitutes, all of whom tested HIV-positive, were charged with trading in sex while having an STD, fined \$7 and released. In court, police said testing the women was part of the investigation. A preliminary hearing on the action is scheduled for Dec. 14.

HIV infection rates among prostitutes in Malawi range from 70 percent to 80 percent, health officials report. Roughly 14 percent of the country's 13 million people are HIV-infected, data indicate. Malawi has about 90,000 new infections annually, mostly among young people and women, according to UNAIDS.

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