

To: Hungarian Ministry of Interior
Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Hungarian Ambassadors to South Africa, Rwanda, and Kenya

Cc: Permanent Representation of Hungary EU,
Commissioner for Migration and Home Affairs
European Commission, DG RTD and DG SANTE
International AIDS Society IAS
European AIDS Clinical Society EACS

Brussels, 13 June 2016

Dear Madam/Sir,

Re: Hungary consulates deny Schengen visa to invited and sponsored conference delegates from Africa and deface the passport of a visa applicant

The International Workshop for HIV Observational Databases (IWHOD) and the European AIDS Treatment Group (EATG) are writing to express their deep concern about the attitudes of Hungarian consular officials towards 3 Schengen visa applicants from Kenya, Rwanda, and South Africa. All applicants had been invited to an international conference in Hungary and were unable to attend. We are writing to request information as to why they were denied visas to allow them to attend the conference.

All applicants were delegates from Africa who had submitted high quality scientific abstracts and were subsequently awarded scholarships by the Scientific Committee to attend the conference and present their findings. The 20th IWHOD was held in Budapest 7-9th April 2016 and, as in previous years, included delegates from a number of countries, including from Africa. Confirmations supporting visa applications were sent to invitees in a timely manner as usual. However, this time 3 delegates were unable to secure Schengen visas that would allow them to attend the meeting. Hungarian consular officials seemingly obstructed their applications for a visa.

IWHOD and EATG will inform the scientific community about the encountered difficulties and are currently reconsidering holding any future events in Hungary. We are looking forward to clarification about the reasons why the visas were denied.

Information concerning the 3 visa requests, IWHOD and EATG can be found below:

1. *Male MD, researcher & epidemiologist, Rwanda Biomedical Centre Kigali, Rwanda.* He had applied for a Schengen visa after receiving an invitation to present his findings in February but a visa was granted only on 6th April and valid only once the conference was over.

2. *Female Researcher from Christian Health Association of Kenya, Nairobi.* She had applied for her visa on receiving the invitation to attend. The Embassy of Hungary has never responded to her application and did not respond any e-mail (their only accepted means of communication). She was forced to cancel her flight.

3. *Male Dr pharm, Division of Clinical Pharmacology, University of Cape Town, South Africa.* The Consular Secretary Katalin Törös from the Embassy of Hungary in Pretoria made inquiries about the visa application with the conference secretariat. Sufficient documentation was provided to her. However, despite all efforts, the Embassy denied the visa on 31st March, stating that the information in support of the application was not reliable, that that his intention to leave the country before visa expiry could not be ascertained despite an already pre-paid return ticket. Importantly, the applicant's passport was returned defaced and is unusable.

We thank you in advance and look forward to hearing from you

Kholoud Porter
IWHOD Secretariat



Koen Block
EATG Executive Director



The **International Workshop for HIV Observational Databases (IWHOD)** is a by invitation only conference where researchers present and discuss the most recent confidential unpublished scientific findings. The workshop is attended by around 180 scientists from around the world, but mostly from Europe, Canada, United States and Sub-Saharan Africa. Attendees are selected based on their submitted research abstract. Since 1998, the conference has been organised on a yearly basis in Europe and at several occasions in New Member States (Budapest 2005, Prague 2011, Cavtat (Croatia) 2013).

Over time, HIV observational databases have had a tremendous impact on the management and prevention of HIV and related diseases. The databases are financially supported by national governments, the European Commission (DG Research) and the pharmaceutical industry. The IWHOD workshop facilitates cross continental collaboration between investigators.

The **European AIDS Treatment Group EATG** is a patient based community organisation advocating for the advancement of research in HIV and related co-infections, covering the WHO Europe zone and collaborating with European Institutions. The EATG has representatives in several cohort studies and collaborations and participates in IWHOD meetings.