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**Statement by Michael Saag, MD, FIDSA, Chair, HIV Medicine Association and Kenneth Mayer, MD, FIDSA, Co-chair, Center for Global Health Policy, Denouncing the Conviction of Gay Couple in Malawi**

We condemn the conviction and harsh sentencing of Malawi citizens Steven Monjeza and Tiwonze Chimbalonga for alleged "gross indecency and unnatural acts" solely on the basis of their committed relationship to one another, and we join with others in calling for their immediate release. This action is a gross violation of human rights. The criminalization of individuals based on sexual orientation also threatens the public health response to the HIV epidemic in a country with high HIV prevalence. Letting this conviction and sentence stand, and the policies that made it possible, not only fundamentally violates the human rights of these two men, but also threatens to undermine Malawi's ongoing battle against this deadly disease.

We are deeply concerned about the enduring, harmful impact this sentence will have on HIV prevention and treatment efforts throughout the country. Our opposition to this law and sentencing is grounded in our support for fundamental human rights and based on our experience as physicians and scientists. We see firsthand the deadly impact that discrimination has on HIV prevention and treatment efforts and feel strongly that a key prerequisite to effective HIV prevention and care is public policy and laws that protect the rights of all individuals against discrimination, especially those who are marginalized and/or at high risk for HIV infection. Policies that encourage discrimination based on behaviors threaten individual lives and the public health by discouraging individuals from engaging in HIV prevention, from learning their HIV status and from seeking HIV care and treatment – all critical components to controlling the HIV pandemic.

We urge swift action to release these two men and to amend the penal code to protect fundamental human rights, eliminate discrimination, and support efforts to end the deadly HIV pandemic in Malawi and around the globe. We call on the U.S. government and its representatives to use their influence as world leaders and donors to Malawi to work for the release of this innocent couple and for an end to homophobic and discriminatory policies in Malawi.

**For more information on this topic, please contact David Bryden at (703) 740-4956 or [dbryden@idsociety.org](mailto:dbryden@idsociety.org). To arrange an interview with an HIV/AIDS expert, please contact Deirdre Shesgreen at (703) 740-4954 or [dshesgreen@idsociety.org](mailto:dshesgreen@idsociety.org).**

*The Center for Global Health Policy is an organization of physicians and scientists dedicated to promoting the effective use of U.S. funding for addressing the global HIV/AIDS and TB epidemics by providing scientific and policy information to policymakers, federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the media. The Center is a project of the Infectious Diseases Society of America and the HIV Medicine Association.*

*HIVMA is the professional home for more than 3,600 physicians, scientists and other health care professionals dedicated to the field of HIV/AIDS. Nested within IDSA, HIVMA promotes quality in HIV care and advocates policies that ensure a comprehensive and humane response to the AIDS pandemic informed by science and social justice. All three organizations are based in Arlington, Va.*