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ISSN 1729-8997

(Online Edition)

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Vol 7, No.27, December '07 - January 2008

A Newsletter of the Organization for the Protection of Children's Rights

Message from the President

HIV/AIDS is a severe socio-economic problem that is affecting millions of adults and children around the world. Young people are at the center of this devastating epidemic in terms of infection rates.

As you will see in the first article of this newsletter, the majority of new infections are among young people aged 15-24 since they account for 50 percent of the world's new HIV infections¹. Also, it is devastating to learn that nearly 2,000 children become HIV positive every day.

In 2001, at a special session of the UN General Assembly, 189 leaders from Member States adopted the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS which set targets for the delivery of effective HIV prevention, treatment, care and support needed to halt and begin to reverse the global epidemic by 2015. One of the many targets that were set aimed at ensuring that 90% of young people be knowledgeable about HIV by 2005.²

Unfortunately, fewer than 50 percent of young people had attained comprehensive knowledge levels of HIV/AIDS by 2005.³ It is critical to educate vulnerable groups to all aspects of this deadly disease in order to provide the necessary information that will save millions of lives. There are many myths that people continue to believe and so much misinformation about HIV/AIDS that it is imperative that the

correct information be disseminated to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS infections.

A recent survey in the Philippines demonstrated that 63 percent of youngsters in that country believed that they were immune to HIV. In Indonesia, 70 percent of young women aged 15 to 24 believed that a healthy looking person could not have HIV/AIDS, as did 40 percent of their counterparts in Vietnam and Cambodia.⁴ Clearly, children and young people are not getting the vital information and skills that they need to be protected from HIV/AIDS.

Prevention programs among other initiatives are key to ensuring the survival and healthy development of our youth. We know what needs to be done to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS, all levels of society (international organizations, national governments, community groups, schools, etc.) have the responsibility to pull their heads out of the sand and get things done.

Footnotes:

¹ UNICEF, *East Asia: Children and HIV/AIDS, 2005*, page 9.

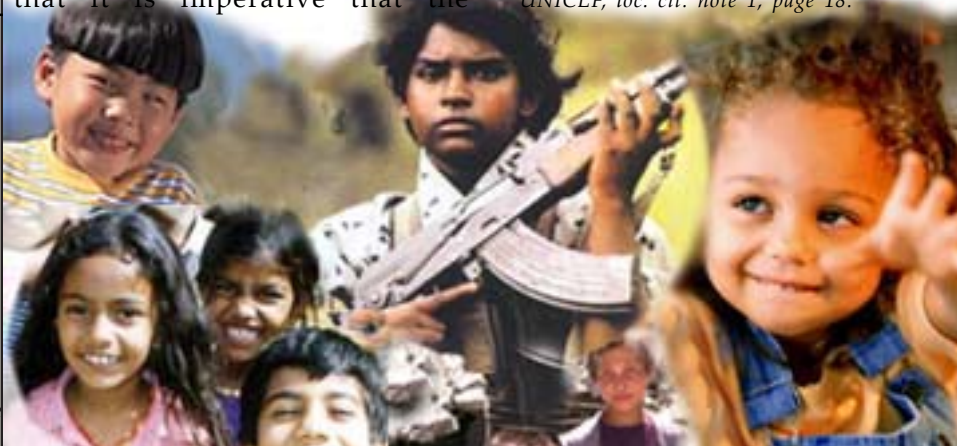
² UNAIDS, *Report on the global AIDS epidemic: Executive summary, 2006*, page 4

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ UNICEF, *loc. cit. note 1*, page 18.



Riccardo Di Done



The AIDS Pandemic and Children

The face of HIV/AIDS is primarily young, and all too often female. Almost 12 million young people (aged 15-24) and 3 million children live with HIV or AIDS. The majority of new infections are among the young - 6,000 young people and almost 2,000 children become HIV-positive every day.



For every person living with HIV/AIDS, a family and a community is affected. As the disease kills parents and caregivers, it fuels poverty and despair among children and adolescents and stretches family resources to untenable limits. Many children are literally watching their hopes and dreams crumble as their parents and caregivers succumb to AIDS. Destitute, many children are being forced to leave school and, in many cases, end up on the street. Sheer poverty means that many will put themselves into highly exploitative situations just to survive. At the most risk are those least able to protect themselves – young girls.

The impact of HIV/AIDS on children is seen most dramatically in the rising numbers of youngsters orphaned by the disease. Fourteen million children under the age of 15 have lost

330,000 children die of AIDS every year. If nothing is done then more than 1 million will die by 2010.

one or both parents to AIDS. Four out of five of them live in sub-Saharan Africa. By 2010, as many as 25 million children are likely to become orphaned as a result of the disease.

Almost as lethal as the virus itself are the stigma and discrimination attached to people living with, or affected by, HIV and AIDS. Because of the ignorance and denial that cloak the disease, children whose parents have died from AIDS are often singled out for abuse in places they come to for support and care – harshly treated in foster homes, denied access to schooling and health care, stripped of their inheritances, and left to the streets.

Stigma and discrimination remain the most potent barrier

to testing, treatment and prevention. This explains in part why, in some countries, up to 90% of people who are HIV-positive don't know their status and may be unwittingly spreading the disease.

Equally deadly is the fact that only a fraction of the world's 1 billion young people have the

knowledge or life skills to prevent infection, or are aware of the risks they face. This is especially lethal for girls in societies where access to accurate information and services for sexual health is discouraged or prohibited.

The outlook is grim. In surveys of HIV-related behaviour and knowledge among young people in 60 countries, the vast majority could not accurately say how HIV is transmitted. One fifth of the pupils in a secondary school in Botswana believed they could screen out risky partners by looks alone. This misinformation is especially dangerous in a country where one in three of their potential sex partners is HIV-positive. In countries with generalized HIV epidemics such as Cameroon, Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Lesotho and Sierra Leone, more than 80 per cent of young women aged 15 to 24 do not have sufficient information about HIV.

Many young people who do know something about HIV often do not protect themselves because they lack the life skills or the means to adopt safe behaviours. As is the case with sexual activity, adolescence is also the time most people first experiment with drugs. Adolescents often do not have the skills nor the incentives to avoid starting drug use. Once they have, many quickly progress from inhaling or snorting to injecting, which dramatically increases their risk of infection.

Yet young people and children are also our greatest hope for stopping the disease. Evidence shows that when serious and sustained prevention efforts are targeted towards youths, HIV rates decline:

- In Kampala, Uganda, HIV prevalence rates among pregnant girls aged 15 to 19 fell from 22 per cent to 7 per cent from 1990 to 2000. This drop followed strong leadership from the president, broad-based partnerships and an effective public education campaign.
- In Cambodia, which has the region's highest proportion of adults living with HIV, infection rates among sex workers declined from 42 per cent in 1998 to 29 per cent in 2002, with the greatest drop among sex workers under age 20.
- In Brazil, thanks to widespread information campaigns and prevention services, half the young men having sex for the first time in 1999 used a condom, compared to fewer than 5 per cent in 1986. Condom sales rocketed from 70 million in 1993 to 320 million in 1999.

Women and girls are particularly vulnerable

Girls are disproportionately impacted by the disease. They are physically more vulnerable to infection, but sexual violence and entrenched gender-based inequities compound their risks.

Girls are getting infected faster. In sub-Saharan Africa, two young girls aged 15 to 24 are infected for every boy in the same age group. Among adolescents aged 15 to 19 in worst-hit areas, five or six girls are infected for every boy. In Jamaica, the proportion is 3 to 1.

Girls are also getting infected earlier. In eastern and southern Africa, studies have shown that 17 to 22 per cent of girls aged 15 to 19 are already HIV-positive, compared to 3 to 7 per

cent of boys of similar age. This pattern, indicating 'age mixing', or sex between older men and young women, is also seen in other regions around the world.

Some cultural mores exacerbate the spread of HIV. Female genital mutilation can spread the virus through the use of unsterilised equipment. In some parts of Africa, there is a dangerous myth that sex with a virgin can cure AIDS. In cultures where it is vital for girls to be virgins at marriage, some girls engage in unsafe sexual practices such as unprotected anal intercourse.

Girls are expected to be ignorant about sex and sexuality in many societies. Surveys have shown that far fewer girls than boys aged 15 to 19 have basic knowledge about HIV. Half of the teenage girls surveyed in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, did not realize that a healthy-looking person can have HIV/AIDS. Such cultural mores can discourage girls from accessing health care facilities, further increasing their vulnerability.

Reported rape and sexual violence are on the rise in many countries, but most sexual violence still goes unreported. Evidence suggests that a large share of new HIV infections is due to violence in homes, schools, the workplace and other social arenas. Forced or coerced sex renders a woman even more vulnerable to infection, and the younger she is, the more likely it is

that she will contract HIV. Surveys of nine Caribbean countries found that almost half of adolescent girls who had had intercourse reported that their first sexual experience was forced.

Globally, girls and women are more likely to be poor and powerless, have less education, less access to land, credit or cash, and to social services. In a number of countries, a woman's right to divorce, property and inheritance is not recognised, and in others, poorly enforced. These are factors that leave women and girls without viable means for independent economic survival in the best of times, and outright economic desperation at the worst. Grinding poverty, along with a lack of education and productive resources, multiplies the chances that women and girls must sell sex as their only economic option. In AIDS-affected communities, 'survival sex' has become common currency – traded for food, cash, 'shelter' – even for education. ■ (UNICEF)



In 1988, the UN General Assembly expressed deep concern at the pandemic proportions of the AIDS virus, and noting that the World Health Organization (WHO) declared 1 December 1988 World AIDS Day

Sex Education

Curriculum Angers Indian Conservatives

By Amelia Gentleman, The International Herald Tribune



Should a 15-year-old Indian student be permitted to look at anatomical drawings that illustrate how an adolescent's body develops into an adult form? This simple question stands at the heart of an uneasy debate over Indian values, contemporary morality and the best way to educate modern teenagers in the facts of life.

As Indian society races through extraordinarily rapid social change, a dispute over the content of a sex education textbook throws a spotlight on the ever-shifting boundaries between cultural acceptability and sexual taboos. It shows how conservative forces in India are battling fiercely to resist the swift pace of change, as a new generation of adolescents, particularly in the cities, are brought up on an untested diet of Western soap operas, cable television and increasingly globalized values.

In recent weeks, six of India's 28 states have suspended a new "adolescence education" program designed for 15- to 17-year-olds in all state-run schools and devised jointly by the National Education Ministry and the government body responsible for combating the spread of AIDS.

Outrage, mainly among rightist parties, which often promote themselves as defenders of an ill-defined notion of "Indian morality," was prompted primarily by a flip-chart of illustrations for use by teachers as they summarized the physical changes experienced by teenagers during puberty. Information in the curriculum on contraception and sexually-transmitted diseases also provoked anger. One by one,

Profile

Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Rajasthan - some of the largest Indian states - declared that the content of the course was unacceptable for

Indian children and announced a suspension of the program. The government of Kerala has stopped teaching the course temporarily while a review board modifies the textbooks, excising the unacceptable elements. The chief minister of Madhya Pradesh, Shivraj Singh Chouhan, wrote in a letter of protest to the Central Education Ministry that the "government has devaluated Indian culture and its values." "Instead, the younger generation should be taught about yoga, Indian culture and its values," he concluded.

Announcing a decision to suspend the course in Karnataka, Chief Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy said at a news conference: "Sex education may be necessary in Western countries, but not in India, which has rich culture. It will have adverse effect on young minds, if implemented." This response has elicited seething frustration in the National AIDS Control Organization, where officials are struggling to combat an AIDS epidemic. Last year, India became the country with the highest number of HIV-positive people, with an estimated 5.7 million cases.

The director of the AIDS organization, Sujatha Rao, said she regretted the way the subject had become a political flash point. "There is no place for a debate here on cultural sensibilities. This is a basic question of saving lives," she said in an interview at the group's Delhi headquarters.

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Tunza International Children's Conference on the ENVIRONMENT

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in collaboration with the Young Agenda 21 Foundation of Norway will host the 2008 Tunza International Children's Conference on the Environment which will bring together 1,000 people (700 children and 300 chaperones), between 10 and 14 years, from over 100 countries. The

providing them with a forum to share experiences and opinions and to collectively voice their concerns for the environment. It will also inspire them to initiate and implement community environmental projects in their school and community.

The Conference will offer a series of workshops organized by both local and international facilitators on the themes of the Conference



conference will be held from 17 to 21 June 2008 in Stavanger, Norway.

The Conference is a follow-up on the decision adopted at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, in Johannesburg, South Africa, which states that children's views should be incorporated in decisions regarding environment.

The Conference will increase the children's understanding of environmental issues by

(Energy, Biodiversity, Water and Production and Consumption). The Conference will culminate in a set of commitments to be implemented by the children.

News

A Junior Board which comprises of 12 members of eight representatives from the UNEP regions (North America, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, West Asia, Asia and the Pacific and 4 from Norway) will help with preparations for the Conference and ensures that the facilities and programme of the conference reflects the needs of the children.

'Bal Sabha' celebrated in Mumbai

The Vatsalya Trust, a charitable organization running a registered adoption center for children in Mumbai celebrated Bal Divas on 29th November 2007. Children's Day is observed in India each year on the birth anniversary of the country's first Prime Minister, Shri Jawaharlal Nehru because of his love and commitment for children. To celebrate this occasion coinciding with the silver jubilee of the Vatsalya Trust, representative children from schools in Mumbai were invited to speak about their perceptions and ideas about their lives, their peers, family and society.



Jehangir Sheikh of Project Kiran speaking at the Bal Sabha

Events

The Organization for the Protection of Children's Rights (O.P.C.R.), Mumbai participated with a small delegation of children

from Project Kiran. Six street children – regular attendees of Project Kiran - participated in the program. These included Suneel, Jehangir, Mangal, Karan, Bahadur and Chand. With fervor yet trepidation they expressed their grievances about the apathy of people particularly the police in ill-treating them. They demanded justice – a home to live, protection from offenders, freedom from drug abuse and most of all, the desire to learn and advance in life. It surprised, even shocked many children from schools to see the deprivation of these children. The program allowed children from all walks of life to express their hopes, aspirations and grievances from their family and teachers as well as society at large. ■

Sharing Joys of Christmas with the UNDERPRIVILEGED

This year, as in the past 17 years, the Organization for the Protection of Children's Rights (O.P.C.R.), Canada, organized Christmas Shows for underprivileged children in Montreal and Quebec city. The events were held at the Sandman Hotel in Longueuil (Montreal) on December 18th, 2007 and the Hilton Hotel on December 20th, 2007 in Quebec city. Over 700 children participated at the two Christmas Shows which brought joy and hope in the hearts of the little ones.



the extraordinary decor executed by skilful experts from the Seranno Studio creates a virtual fairytale for the children. The professional team of Les Clowns du Carrousel presented a variety of music, songs, animation, shows and workshops welcoming the little ones surrounded by their mascots friends: Polix from the Quebec Provincial Police, Chico from Acme International Mascottes, Slush Puppie from Monroy, Natureuil from Clubs 4-H of Quebec, Bobo from Brunet Drugstores, Safety Bear from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Jippy from Metro GP, Alasso from Colisée Pepsi-Quebec Remparts, Victor from Rouge et Or, Vigile from the Quebec City Police, Fix from AutoFix and PAMA, the O.P.C.R.'s mascot. Gifts were distributed by none other than Santa Claus followed by a gargantuan buffet.

Events

"You are laughing, dancing with the fantastic Christmas characters and the popular Clowns du Carrousel. Suddenly, you hear the sounds of a multitude of sleigh bells. You hope, from the bottom of your heart, that they are announcing the arrival of Santa Claus. You excitedly search to find the origin of this music filled with promise. All of a sudden, you see the reindeers Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Dunder, Blixen and Rudolph. This surprise exceeds all your expectations... They lead your hero, Santa in his sleigh loaded with a mountain of presents!"

The magic and excitement of the mythical characters are brought alive by more than 60 volunteers who transform themselves into elves, reindeers and fairies, which along with

So far, more than 11,000 children in need have experienced the magic of Christmas with members and volunteers of the O.P.C.R. This year, the disadvantaged children from 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade who attend Du Parc Quebec School, Étienne-Chartier School of St-Gilles, De l'Amitié School of Ste-Agathe and St-Paul-Apôtre School of Quebec, participated in this real childhood dream. ■

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Sex Education Angers Indian Conservatives

According to its research, one-third of the reported infections across India are in the 15-29 age group and 50 percent of all new infections are in this young category.

"There is much more permissiveness around today than a generation ago; young people are more aware of their sexuality," she said. "There is much greater access to information about sex from the Internet, from the cinema, from television. "This generation needs to be much more knowledgeable, so that they are aware of the risks," she said. "I have a feeling that the conservative elements in our society are unable to cope with these dynamic changes that are taking place. There is a fear that this area was once under their control and is now spiraling out of their control."

The timing of this debate comes as self-appointed defenders of Indian morality have caused noisy controversy on various other issues. In every area of life, India is struggling to find a commonly acceptable line between decorous behavior and actions deemed to outrage moral sensibilities. Despite the increasingly permissive atmosphere, the occasional kiss or display of excess flesh triggers a nationwide, media-fueled storm.

The central government decided to ban the broadcasting of Fashion TV in March, in response to complaints about programs like "Midnight Hot" which showed models in flimsy bikinis. The Information and Broadcasting Ministry said that the programs were "against good taste and decency, denigrate women and are likely to adversely affect public morality."

All of which makes the teaching of sex education an extremely delicate business. Vandana Sharma, director of Nari Raksha Samiti, or the Women's Protection League, a charity that has been campaigning for better sex education in schools, said the course was more vital than ever before.

"This kind of teaching was not necessary 10 years ago. But now India is merging more and more with Western cultures, there is easy access to Western culture through cable television," she said. "Teenagers see characters having extra-marital affairs and women in seduction roles, and they want to experiment, too. The real problem is with the soaps - these are against Indian culture - not the sex education, which really represents the solution."

<http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/05/24/africa/letter.php>