

Press release

Business, government and civil society asked to partner in innovative actions on HIV

Proper work opportunities must be created for people living with HIV

Toronto, 15 August 2006 – In many low and middle-income countries, growing levels of HIV are continuing to cause serious economic and development set backs. Companies are losing a significant part of their workforce, particularly in high prevalence countries.

While some businesses have made progress in AIDS workplace policies, new constructive and sustainable solutions are needed to develop economically-based partnerships with business, local government, communities and civil society that will reap benefits for all.

Discussions on ‘Solutions on poverty, inequality and AIDS: The economic and social empowerment of people living with HIV and AIDS’, will be heard at a Satellite session co-chaired by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and UNAIDS’ Cosponsor the International Labour Organization on Tuesday, 15 August 2006 at the XVI International Conference on AIDS being held in Toronto, Canada. The satellite will explore solutions and strategies for the economic and social empowerment of people living with HIV and their families which could include:

- Ensuring that people living with HIV and their families have proper access to prevention, treatment, care and support mechanisms.
- Building on educational skills and training for people living with HIV and their families including businesses setting up programmes to develop relevant skills and build enterprises.
- Larger companies experienced with developing and implementing workplace policies on combating HIV empowering and training small businesses to do the same.
- Corporations helping to develop and maintain programmes for HIV prevention, treatment and care in the areas where they are located.
- Building partnerships with local government, private sector institutions and civil society.
- Governments giving offering incentives to companies that undertake the above activities.

“Employment opportunities empower and help people living with HIV to be as productive as possible and to be properly integrated into society, as they should be,” Sir Roy Trotman, Secretary-General of the Barbados Workers’ Union at a press conference to highlight the satellite issue.

Emphasizing that targeted interventions are important for social equity and for the efficacy of results, UNAIDS' Director of Monitoring and Evaluation, Paul De Lay said: "Success in stopping the epidemic, both in countries with concentrated and generalized epidemics, depends crucially on ensuring that people at most risk, including the poor and marginalized, have adequate access to prevention, that they adopt safer behavior, and that they are supported in leading productive lives."

"Countries can address the trend of low productivity by investing in the community and properly drawing upon the skills and capacities of people living with HIV," said James Laing, Director of Africappractice.

Elizabeth Gordon Dudu, UNDP's HIV/AIDS Technical Adviser, South Africa, said: "The positive benefits on communities are also significant – greater involvement of people living with HIV in the working community could help reduce stigma and discrimination and create greater awareness around HIV and HIV prevention."

Some successful experiences offer examples to build upon. In Thailand, the Positive Partner Project has successfully paired HIV-positive and HIV-negative people in income-producing partnerships. They receive small loans for activities such as livestock raising, laundry services and other low-cost, rapid-return enterprises. And in Brazil, the Business Council Against AIDS has developed educational programmes for smaller businesses, empowering them to implement policy changes and realise longer-term benefits.

Carlos Passarelli, Director of the International Center for Technical Cooperation (ICTC), Brazil, emphasizes the need for better partnerships between business and government. "In addition to forward-looking workplace policies, businesses must build the capacity of HIV positive groups to establish their own businesses. With the epidemic reaching out into the periphery and smaller cities, local governments must create a facilitative environment," he said.

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