

UNAIDS APPLAUDS MAJOR NEW BOLLYWOOD FILM ON AIDS

Mumbai/Geneva, 20 August 2004 – India’s entertainment industry is challenging the AIDS epidemic head-on. For the first time ever, a mainstream Bollywood Hindi film, *Phir Milenge (We’ll Meet Again)*, has placed AIDS at the heart of its story line.

“When Bollywood, one of the world’s largest film industries with massive audiences, produces a film about AIDS, everyone has to sit up and take notice,” said Dr Peter Piot, Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). “It is extremely significant that Bollywood is joining the struggle against the epidemic and helping to break the silence that surrounds HIV and AIDS. We applaud the making of this film.”

Phir Milenge is directed by Revathy Menon, an award-winning Indian actress turned director. Its central character is a successful career woman, Tamanna, who suddenly learns she is HIV-positive. The film touches on ignorance, fear, stigma, discrimination in the workplace and the use of the courts to right wrongs committed against those living with HIV.

The Bollywood industry is huge. Based in Mumbai in the west of India, it produces some 800 films a year. On any given day, 15 million Indians watch such movies. *Phir Milenge* places itself very much in the Bollywood musical tradition and features established stars such as Shilpa Shetty, Salman Khan and Abhishek Bachchan.

“I think we’ve managed to make a really sensitive, moving, groundbreaking film about one woman coming to terms with HIV,” said Shilpa Shetty, who plays Tamanna in *Phir Milenge*. “I had tears in my eyes when I saw the final film. I think we’ve done a good job.”

The director, Revathy Menon, chose to use the power and status of Bollywood actors in a mainstream film to bring into sharp focus the problem of HIV and the obstacles facing those who become infected. An estimated 5.1 million Indians are living with HIV, the highest number outside South Africa. “People are dying or getting infected every minute of every day and I hope this film will highlight what we are up against in India today,” Ms Revathy said. “I think it is vital to both confront injustice and help people get access to treatment.”

“It is up to all of us to challenge stigma and I hope I’ve played my part by taking on the role of Rohit, when some other actors were, perhaps, a little reluctant,” said Salman Khan. “Rohit becomes infected with the virus, showing that it can happen to absolutely anyone.”

“I want *Phir Milenge* to be a real eye-opener,” said Abhishek Bachchan, who plays Tarun, a lawyer in the film. “We must all take the threat of AIDS more seriously and

become more active in trying to combat it. That means everyone – from the man and woman in the street right up to the highest levels of power.”

UNAIDS joins Ms Revathy in hoping that the film will help stimulate informed discussion about HIV and, more importantly, give a sympathetic human face to those living with the virus: in this case, the face is female. “Women are most affected by HIV and the fact that the story revolves around Tamanna, a woman, who fights stigma and injustice, is exciting,” said Dr Piot of UNAIDS. “When you empower a woman, you empower a family, you empower a community and it is from there that we will find the strength to reverse this epidemic.”

Editor’s note:

The synopsis of Phir Milenge is as follows:

Tamanna (Shilpa Shetty) is a 26-year-old woman who works for a successful advertising agency. At a school reunion, she meets Rohit (Salman Khan), on whom she had a school-girl crush. The pair spend time together, fall in love and have sex. They part company, promising that they’ll meet again (Phir Milenge). After they have gone their separate ways, Tamanna discovers that she is HIV- positive. She tries to contact Rohit in vain.

As a result of her diagnosis becoming public knowledge, Tamanna loses her job and has to fight this injustice through the courts. In the process she meets the lawyer, Tarun (Abhishek Bachchan), who takes on her case. Rohit also discovers that he is HIV-positive and returns, hoping he has not infected her. After a number of setbacks, Tamanna eventually triumphs in court as Rohit succumbs to the virus.

Phir Milenge is a Sahara Manoranjan project, conceived and produced by Percept Picture Company. It will be premiered in Mumbai on 26 August 2004 and be released worldwide on 27 August. For more information on the film, please visit <http://www.phirmilenge.com>

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