

[NOTE: CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY]

Speech of the Executive Director

at the

Youth Force Rally

Bangkok, 10 July 2004

by

Peter Piot

UNAIDS Executive Director

Today's young generation has not known a world without AIDS, and there is no solution to the epidemic without your active involvement in the response. Part of the reason I say that is that adults need your help in understanding how to do it right.

Young people offer fresh perspectives and you must continue to urge adults to act with urgency, honesty and courage. If adults greet the reality of the lives of young people with judgment or avoidance rather than open dialogue, then the goal of ending the spread of AIDS is out of reach.

You understand the kinds of strategies that will be effective, and you should play a major role in designing programming.

We need HIV prevention based on evidence, not ideology. Every letter of the ABC approach represents an intervention that works for some people. We know that delayed onset of sexual debut is important in prevention. And we know that condoms are an essential part of prevention as well – someone's age should not prevent them from having access to a tool that can save their life.

Young people living with HIV or AIDS, and from diverse backgrounds, can speak to the challenges they face, and the response that is needed. During the conference, we will hear the voices of many courageous young people living with HIV and AIDS. They represent many others with HIV who live in fear of being discovered and in fear of being alienated from their families, communities, and friends.

There are millions of young people who feel they are outside the mainstream of society – young men who have sex with men, and others -- they are isolated from the support system of their peers. Who better to stand up for them than other young people? Who better to lead in the effort to combat stigma?

Youth Involvement in Planning

All over the world, young people have emerged as important leaders in the response to AIDS. In Ethiopia, the assertive leadership of young people led to the first National Youth Consultation on Sexual and Reproductive Health and HIV/AIDS, where they developed the first national youth charter and action plan.

Young people have a right to be involved in developing programs that are intended to protect them. In fact, youth involvement as decision-makers is one of the most important strategies in HIV prevention. Young people should be full, equal partners in developing and implementing national AIDS action frameworks.

“Tokenistic” involvement is neither acceptable nor effective. UNAIDS will be an active supporter of youth involvement in national planning.

Close

We need your voices in the response to AIDS. We need your ideas, perspectives and, most of all, your continued advocacy. “More youth voices equals fewer HIV infections”.

Thank you for your courage and your commitment.