



Press release

AFRICAN UNION PRESIDENT CALLS FOR SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES BEARING THE BURDEN OF HIV EPIDEMIC IN AFRICA

Abuja, 8 July – Alleviating poverty and lifting the debt burden in Africa is currently holding the focus of world leaders. But it is HIV and AIDS and the severe burden it puts on families that is the leading development concern facing the continent. Chairman of the African Union and Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, says African families have a great need for understanding and increased social support at this time. The President said the International AIDS conference in Africa taking place in Abuja this December is a key opportunity to address the predicament of families facing the burden of AIDS.

“We need to build on commitments that turn promises into reality,” says President Obasanjo “Any serious discussion about alleviating poverty in Africa must confront the challenge of AIDS and the severe conditions it has created within families. Making progress to reduce the devastating and destabilizing impact of AIDS is an investment in reducing human suffering, especially to families that are affected,” he said. “My colleagues and I in the African Union will continue to give strong leadership on this issue and support the International AIDS conference in Nigeria in December as a key arena for deeper discussion and development of next steps to turn commitment into action.”

The 14th International Conference on AIDS and STIs in Africa (ICASA) will take place between 4 – 9 December in the Nigerian capital of Abuja. The overarching theme of the conference is ‘HIV and AIDS and the Family’.

“ICASA is about solutions in Africa, for Africa by Africans. We want to make a real impact and start reversing the epidemic,” said ICASA President Femi Soyinka. “With the record numbers of orphans, widows and grandparents looking after their infant grandchildren- the family bears the brunt of the HIV epidemic: economically, socially and culturally. ICASA offers an opportunity to find new ways of strengthening family values like love, security, protection and support for the next generation.”

The ICASA conference expects thousands of participants from governments, international organizations, academic and scientific institutions, youth organizations, non-governmental organizations, community and faith-based organizations, associations of people living with HIV and media outlets. Through plenary sessions, abstracts, round tables and a variety of other interactive events, the conference will focus on how families in Africa will be better empowered to respond to AIDS and how leaders can take actions to keep their commitments on resolving the problems created by AIDS. The conference will discuss scientific innovations to treat and overcome AIDS; leverage the vital role of the private sector in finding resources, and give people living with HIV and AIDS, women and young people a voice in the development of solutions.

“Nigeria saw a tiny drop in prevalence rates last year from 5.8% to 5%. This is encouraging. We are seeing progress with more resources being made available to respond to the epidemic, more focus on treatment to make sure every person living with HIV gets access to ARVs, and more donor participation in finding solutions,” said the Chairman of the National Action Committee on AIDS, Professor Babatunde Osotimehin. “The National Action

Committee on AIDS fully supports ICASA and urges all of Africa to come to Abuja to be a part of this important conference.”

In the lead up to the conference, partners and donors are joining together to support and help send out strong messages on AIDS in Africa. But more financial resources are needed, especially with regards to sponsorship of events, information sharing and ensuring participation.

“We all need to come together at this conference to think, debate and take decisions about our course of action,” said UNAIDS Country Coordinator in Nigeria Dr Pierre Mpele. “UNAIDS will work with the ICASA Secretariat and the Nigerian Government to help reach out as widely as possible. We urge everyone to join us in this important event for Africa.”

The International Conference on AIDS and STIs in Africa was founded in 1986 by a group of African scientists. ICASA is held bi-annually in African countries and is Africa’s leading forum for discussion of developments and trends about the AIDS epidemic in the continent. As of 2004, an estimated 25.4 million people are living with HIV. In Nigeria an estimated 3.8 million are living with HIV - the majority of which are aged between 15-49.

Registration is currently underway and scholarships are available to young people, scientists, people living with HIV and journalists who need support to attend. For more information on how to sign up for registration, please visit the ICASA web site www.icasa2005.org.ng or contact the ICASA Secretariat. For information on how to support ICASA and help drive Africa forward in the fight against AIDS and poverty, please contact the ICASA President Femi Soyinka.

A newsletter containing the latest information on ICASA progress and events will be available shortly. To receive a copy, please contact the ICASA Secretariat.

Contacts

ICASA 2005 Secretariat

Plot 823, Ralph Shodeinde Street (inside the NACA premises)

Central Business District

Abuja, Nigeria

Tel: +234 9 672 0215 / +234 803 304 9772

Email: infor@icasa2005.org.ng and madaba.communications@icasa2005.org.ng

Website. www.icasa2005.org.ng