



# Youth Remind Adults: We're Here to Work Together

*VIPs, AIDS Leadership Leave During Youth-focused Video*

**BANGKOK, THAILAND** – Around the world, nearly one-half of all new HIV infections are among young people. Currently there are around 1.2 billion adolescents – the largest number of adolescents in history. We are being affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic in countless ways. Hundreds of young people are gathered at the XV International AIDS Conference as part of the Bangkok YouthForce - an international network of youth activists and adult allies working to raise the awareness and visibility of youth and youth issues around HIV/AIDS.

“We welcomed them [the adults] in the opening ceremony and when it was time for us to be on stage, they walked out on us – they should have welcomed us instead.”

Unfortunately we, the young people at this conference, felt slighted during the opening ceremonies of the XV International AIDS Conference on the evening of Sunday, July 11, by many of the adults present. During a short movie featuring young people fighting HIV and AIDS in

their own countries in the their own ways, VIP guests on the floor of the arena streamed out the exits.



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## Young People and HIV/AIDS: Ten Facts You Should Know

1. More than half of all new HIV infections around the world occur among those under the age 25; most of these young people are between the ages of 15-24.

2. Every day, between 5,000 and 6,000 new HIV infections occur among 15-24 years olds. Every 14 seconds, a young person becomes infected with HIV.

3. There are more than 12 million young people under the age of 25 estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS around the world. Ten million are between the ages of 15-24. Those under 25 represent almost one-third of the global total of people estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS. Those between the ages of 15-24 represent more than a quarter of the global total of people estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS.

4. Most young people with HIV/AIDS are girls and young women. Girls and young women represent 62% of young people, ages 15-24, estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS around the world. In sub-

Saharan Africa, girls and young women represent three quarters (76%) of young people living with HIV/AIDS. Girls and young women are biologically, socially, and economically more vulnerable to HIV infection.

5. Most young people living with HIV/AIDS live in sub-Saharan Africa (62%), followed by Asia (22%), Latin America and the Caribbean (7%), and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (6%). High-income countries and North Africa and the Middle East together represent 3%.

6. Many of the worst affected countries have very young populations, creating a dangerous confluence that deepens the epidemic's societal impact. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, more than half of the population is under the age of 18.

7. Young people face particular vulnerabilities that put them uniquely at risk for HIV. In addition, young people are diverse and different groups of young people need dis-

inct approaches and interventions. In addition to girls and young women, these include young: injection drug users, men who have sex with men, sex workers, and children who have been orphaned by HIV/AIDS.

8. Most young people at risk for and living with HIV do not have access to needed prevention, care, and treatment services. Most young people at risk, and those already living with HIV, do not perceive themselves to be at risk.

9. Young people are the hope for stopping the epidemic -- in those countries with large-scale prevention successes, young people are often the first to respond.

10. Young people do and need to play an active role in planning prevention, care, treatment, and research efforts, and need to be included in such efforts.

*Courtesy: www.youthandhiv.org/ bangkok*

## So Many Effects on Youth

AIDS is not only a public health issue, it pervades into all sectors of a nation: governments, households, banks, educational institutions, and most importantly of all, it has a tremendous impact on individuals. Particularly on young people. According to the United Nations Population Fund's annual report entitled "State of the World's Population," by 2003, the epidemic had orphaned 13 million children. In addition, every 14 seconds, another young person between ages 15 and 24 is infected.

By detrimentally impacting youth, AIDS puts a dent in a nation's current and potential workforce: as an increasing number of workers fall ill or die due to AIDS, a nation's intellectual and human capacity depletes, leading to marginally decreasing productivity. South Africa exemplifies a nation that will face dire effects of the epidemic on its productivity; according to the World Bank, its gross domestic product (GDP) will be 17 percent lower by 2010 than it would be

without AIDS.

When a child's family is hit by AIDS (i.e. someone in the family is sick), he/

"Without effective preventive measures – those that come from foreigners and those from domestic resources – AIDS will continue to take its toll on the future."

she is often forced to put aside education and care for the sick relative. School is sacrificed to either find work to help afford health services, to take care of younger siblings or to assist with other household duties. Many girls turn to casual prostitution – making them extremely vulnerable to HIV.

Leaving school is a common step for many youth who ultimately find themselves powerless to achieve their goals

and dreams. In some cultures, girls are expected to bear children at a very early age; this induces high infant mortality and lower school enrollments. According to Peter Piot of UNAIDS, "Without education, AIDS will continue its rampant spread. With AIDS out of control, education will be out of reach." Education is key for youth to be a part of a productive society. Due to AIDS and orphanhood, school enrollment is reported to have fallen by 20-36 percent in the Central African Republic and Swaziland.

Some of the most marginalized youth are those who become orphans. Without parents or family members, orphans are left wandering the streets, becoming susceptible to sex work or child soldiering. There are many social and economic costs associated with an increasing population of orphans. There have been 14 million orphans since the beginning of the epidemic, and many more who may never be counted. By 2010, there may be as many as 100 million orphans world-

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## YOUTH AND AIDS: THEIR FUTURE IS NOW

On behalf of the World Bank, I want to congratulate the Bangkok YouthForce for their active participation and presence during the *XV International AIDS Conference* – and, most importantly, for the critical work undertaken by the groups they represent to work with and for youth affected and infected by HIV. The Bank clearly recognizes that working with youth and youth-serving organizations is central to combating HIV/AIDS.

With more than half of all new HIV infections occurring among 15-24 year olds, we must continue supporting the valuable and dynamic contributions of youth participating in and identifying creative solutions to slow the ad-

vancement of the epidemic. Youth have been identified as a priority in almost all World Bank funded programs. The Bank has also established a new position for a Children and Youth Advisor whose task is to mainstream youth-related issues in all the Bank's work.

Through the Bank's Multi-Country HIV/AIDS Programs (MAP) and other Bank projects and grants, we have contributed resources to thousands of NGOs, community and faith-based organizations, and public and private sector agencies across sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean. Much of this support is channeled directly to implementing organizations, including youth-serving or-

ganizations, for direct funding of community programs. Similar programs are ongoing in Asia, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and in Middle East and North Africa.

Through over US\$1 billion in MAP funding, which has been committed to over 28 countries in Africa since September 2000, the Bank is tackling the HIV/AIDS pandemic through a multisectoral approach. Institutionally, we are working across a variety of sectors (e.g., education, health, transport) and actively engage a variety of stakeholders (e.g., private companies, faith-based organizations, and youth-serving organizations). Our efforts

are intensified by international partnerships, including serving as a founding co-sponsor of UNAIDS, serving as a trustee of the

"The Bank clearly recognizes that working with youth and youth-serving organizations is central to combating HIV/AIDS."

Global Fund, and working in close relationship with national bodies, both public and private.

Our recognition of the importance of youth-serving organizations mirrors the Bank's efforts to promote

## AIDS IN ARGENTINA—YOUNG WOMEN ARE THE MOST AFFECTED

If you ask a young Argentine woman today about her sexual and reproductive rights, the most probable answer will be silence and a blank expression.

She doesn't know what you're talking about.

The lack of information for young women is alarming, as adolescents do not perceive themselves as subjects of rights. Additionally, the most bizarre rumors regarding sexuality runs rampant in society, especially when adolescents do not have an adult with whom they can speak about sexual issues. "I speak about sexuality just with my friends, never with my parents or at school. Only once a few hygienic towel promoters came to my school and spoke a while about menstruation and the changes that our bodies were experiencing, but nothing else," said Marcela Diaz, a 14-year-old student.

One of the most disturbing areas of the reproductive health of young women in Argentina is sexually transmitted infection, especially HIV/AIDS. This disease constitutes the leading cause of death among women ages 15 — 44-years-old in the city of Buenos Aires. "Regarding HIV, we have some information. Various journalistic programs of TV make special reports on this issue. That way, watching these programs, I've learned about AIDS, how to prevent it, etc. But the truth is that, at the moment of sexual rela-

tions, many times I did it without a condom," Diaz confesses. "I am a bit unconscious."

Her testimony is an example of how, in many cases, the means of prevention are known but still not assimilated completely. Cultural guidelines continue to pervade, and some negative myths persist. Examples of these include the staying "with a condom, sensitivity is lessened" or the infamous "love test," that some boyfriends demand of their girlfriends, which entails having sexual intercourse without protection to prove the girl's love for her boyfriend.

According to reports, 22.6 percent of people living with AIDS in Argentina are women. When compared to previous years, the rate of infection for women is rising. The transmission of HIV from mother-to-child accounts for 6.7 percent of all patients, a high value compared to other countries in the region. In addition, when one looks at age, women are infected at a younger age than men, on average. This corresponds with the findings throughout the world that AIDS is getting younger every day, affecting more women, and that the poor in society are most vulnerable.

*Maria Eugenia Miranda is a young journalist living in Argentina.*

## Opening Ceremonies

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Siphiwe Beresford, a young person attending the conference from South Africa, was angered by the disrespect. "We welcomed them [the adults] in the opening ceremony and when it was time for us to be on stage, they walked out on us — they should have welcomed us instead," he said.

The opening ceremonies were supposed to reflect the messages for the upcoming week. Issues around young people, however, were given little representation. The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, addressed what leadership meant. He rightly included emphasis on women and girls in this process, but failed to mention the meaningful involvement of young people at all levels as an essential contribution to HIV policy and programming.

The Prime Minister of Thailand, Dr. Thaksin Shinawatra, neglected to mention youth as contributors. Two Thai young people who are working at the conference as volunteers were disappointed, yet not surprised by what happened. "[We are] constantly telling the government to remember the youth — that we need to be involved in decision making around issues that so directly affect us," said Suphot Nuan-sadee. "Youth are involved on the program level, but our participation needs to be greater ... our government doesn't give us a chance," added Narisa Pongsopa.

It was not until Miss Universe 2004, Jennifer Hawkins, 20, spoke that young people were even given their own voice on stage. She used the small amount of stage time given to her to remind the delegates that young people need to be involved, too. "I am as old as the virus itself, and I have

never known what life was like without it," she said. "Whereas the biggest danger my parents' generation faced was unplanned pregnancy, my generation has always known that an act of love can also bring with it disasters, including lifelong sexually transmitted diseases, like HIV/AIDS, that can, and do, kill."

The treatment of young people at the opening ceremony was very disappointing because of both the lack of representation and the disrespect of the VIPs to leave during the youth video. In this issue that we are so involved in, leaders cannot walk out on youth. We are here to work together. We must be respected and treated as full and equal partners in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

*Kayley Harrington is a member of the Bangkok YouthForce and Advocates for Youth, and is an editor for the newsletter.*

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FOR MORE INFORMATION ON YOUNG PEOPLE AT THE XV INTERNATIONAL AIDS CONFERENCE, VISIT [WWW.YOUTHANDHIV.ORG/BANGKOK](http://WWW.YOUTHANDHIV.ORG/BANGKOK)



### THE BANGKOK YOUTHFORCE

The Bangkok YouthForce is an international network of youth activists and adult allies from both the developing and developed world attending the XV International AIDS Conference in Bangkok, Thailand. The YouthForce first debuted in 2002 at the XIV AIDS Conference in Barcelona. It is composed of YouthNet/Family Health International, Advocates for Youth, PATH, Save the Children, MTV's Staying Alive Campaign, YouthAIDS, UNAIDS, The Student Global AIDS Campaign, Thai Youth AIDS Prevention Project (TYAP), Youth Against AIDS, Deloitte Emerging Markets, and The Global Youth Coalition on HIV/AIDS.

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## WORLD BANK LEADER SALUTES YOUTH

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activities stressing the role of youth as important stakeholders in the development process. Since the last International AIDS Conference in 2002, the Bank has convened several events designed to promote youth dialogue with Bank representatives. In addition to hosting youth summits, we have organized activities exploring linkages between youth livelihood development and HIV/AIDS, and the role of edutainment media for HIV awareness raising and prevention among youth populations.

In June, we co-hosted an Innovation Marketplace in South Africa with participation from over forty southern African organizational representatives working on youth and HIV-related activities. Our work to "Accelerate the Education Sector Response to HIV/AIDS in Africa" continues through our participation in the IntraAgency Task Team on Education, organized

among UNAIDS co-sponsors to develop a global response, based on universal education completion, mitigation of HIV/AIDS impact on education systems, and school-based prevention.

Whether as active participants in planning, implementation, or management, youth can play significant roles in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Their contributions should not be sidelined as future contributors to the campaign to stop HIV/AIDS. Indeed, their efforts are needed now – we cannot afford to wait. The Bank will always be there to support efforts in mainstreaming youth-related issues and put youth at the center of its agenda in fighting the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

*Debework Zewdie is the co-chair, Leadership Program Committee (XV International AIDS Conference) and director, Global HIV/AIDS Program, World Bank.*

## The Toll of AIDS on the Young

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wide. Given these trends, several generations will be a lot less educated, literate, and focused on a nation's welfare. Without a guardian or family to turn to, orphans lead a particularly difficult life and struggle for survival.

Without effective preventive measures – those that come from foreigners and those from domestic resources – AIDS will continue to take its toll on the future. Countries are vulnerable to crowding-out of non-AIDS related health problems and a rising dilapidated workforce is almost the equivalent of none. Many countries, particularly those in sub-Saharan Africa, without proper, efficient measures, face a bleak outlook, with millions of uneducated and lost young adults.

*Mila Gorovich is a Bangkok YouthForce member and an editor of the Bangkok YouthForce newsletter.*