



## Young People and Women are the Focus of Prevention

*The 4th day of the conference called for access to targeted programs and political leadership that respond to the unique vulnerabilities and service needs of women and young people.*

Women and youth could face an HIV/AIDS catastrophe if concerted attention to their needs is not stepped up now, according to community, scientific, and political leaders participating in the XV International AIDS Conference. Women leaders and other experts further emphasized the critical need to address the social, political, and economic status of women and young people, arguing that failing to do so will undermine the long term effectiveness of any efforts to fight the AIDS epidemic.

“If we are to succeed in preventing

**“Involvement must not be restricted to meetings and conferences.”**

new infections among women and young people, we must be willing to challenge the status quo and to pursue creative and, at times, controversial prevention programs that speak to the realities of their lives,” said Dr. Joep Lange, President of the International AIDS Society and Conference Co-Chair.

Young people are particularly vulnerable to HIV infection. Of the estimated 14,000 new HIV infections that occur each day worldwide, about half are among young people aged 15-24 and 2,000 are among children under age 15.

Lack of access to HIV prevention infor-

mation and health services, and the failure to promote educational messages in a manner that engages young people’s interest were two specific obstacles identified by several speakers. Reflecting on the power of education itself, Mary Crewe, University of Pretoria in South Africa,

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## Report from an Oral Session: Creating Demand for Voluntary Counseling and Testing

The non-governmental organization Population Services International (PSI), has a long history of marketing subsidized condoms to those most in need around the world. Now they are making a name for themselves through their highly-visited voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) clinics in 20 countries. Reports from clinics tell us that clients are predominantly young people. Before PSI set up all these VCT clinics, some free standing, some mobile, and others integrated, in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean, they conducted research to ensure acceptance by potential clients. This oral session presented both qualitative findings about the characteristics that clients demand of a VCT clinic and a case study of a successful program in Zimbabwe, called Head Start.

Though it is important to note that clinic statistics show that young men prefer free-standing clinics, while young women are

more inclined to use integrated clinics, numerous focus group discussions with potential VCT clients have revealed nine core demands:

- Friendly and sympathetic staff;
- To be assured that results will remain confidential;
- A discrete clinic location;
- Psychosocial support pre- and post-testing;
- Provision of follow-up medical treatment if needed;
- To know the accuracy of the test they are taking;
- Same day services;
- Convenient clinic hours and location; and
- Free or lost cost services.

In Zimbabwe, 45% of new HIV infections occur in 15-24 year

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## Youth Affirmed During Meet the Leaders Session

The youth at the XV International AIDS Conference were affirmed during the Meet the Leaders session on July 12, when numerous dignitaries emphasized the importance of youth representation at international conferences.

The panelists—Graca Machel, Leadership Program Patron; Richard Gere, actor and activist; Millie Katana, Board Member of the Global Fund; Mae Chee Sansanee Sienrasuta, a Buddhist nun; Mary Robinson, of the Ethical Globalization Initiative; and John Tedstorm, President and CEO of Transatlantic Partners Against AIDS—came together to discuss the role of leadership in the movement against HIV/AIDS. They responded to questions sent in advance through the Internet, as well as questions submitted by members of the audience. Two panelists in particular—Graca Machel and Sansanee Sienrasute—repeatedly stressed the importance of youth involvement and representation in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Machel noted that all must work to improve youth repre-

sentation at the next conference in Toronto. The Bangkok conference is the first with a formally integrated youth program, which is an important achievement for young people everywhere. But even at this conference, the expensive registration fee prevented many young people from attending.

“Youth are the leaders of the world – they are the best investment that you can make!”

Machel also spoke of the value of ensuring that orphans have relatives upon whom they can rely, and that they are not neglected through stigma and discrimination. Children must know their legal and civil rights and they must not be denied basic access to healthcare and education, she

said, particularly orphans. She gave the example of Uganda, where the president supports universal access to primary education and is working for orphans to obtain secondary and tertiary education.

Tedstrom mentioned youth as well, although in a difference context—the youth/adult partnership. He spoke of the necessity for parents in the former Soviet Union to

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## Report on a Satellite Session: The Power of Media in HIV Prevention

About three-quarters of youth in the United States aged 16—24 years watch MTV. I am one of the 25% of youth who do not.

Still, this session on media, sponsored by the Kaiser Family Foundation, was very engaging because I have never been exposed to MTV’s sexual health education campaign, “Fight for Your Rights: Protect Yourself.” Internationally, this campaign is called “Staying Alive.”

My sexual education experience in high school was unique. My teacher taught our class about sexual reproduction and led discussions about being sexually active. A group of my peers came to a classroom to talk about abstinence, birth

control, protection against STIs, and sexual morals. Even though I am not yet sexually active, I left high school with a fairly comprehensive understanding of my sexual health.

But many other youth in the United States and around the world do not receive this information about their bodies and sexuality in or out of school. MTV reaches one billion people worldwide, and, recognizing their power and influence, are using public service advertising and programs to spread the word about safe sex, condom use, contraception, STIs, and HIV/AIDS.

During the session, I listened to five representatives describe different sexual health campaigns and I viewed clips of their efforts

that were aired on television. MTV also uses the radio and print media to reach youth.

The results of these campaigns have been very positive. Their audience is widespread—roughly 86% of MTV’s viewers are outside of the United States—so their message is reaching a lot of young people. The programming and content of each campaign is adjusted based on the intended audience’s culture and country.

MTV is doing something that is not easy to do: combine entertainment and information to get youth talking about sex and sexual issues. Their research shows

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# Snapshots of Youth



Left: Youth adapt the conference theme.

Below: CoCo Lee and Kami pose with YouthForce members following their press conference.



Right: A young man makes his voice heard.



Above: A Bangkok YouthForce supporter.

## Creating Demand for Voluntary Counseling and Testing

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olds. PSI uses social marketing of VCT services to get the word out to young sexually active and married Zimbabweans about their clinics. They also try to use social franchising to establish new affordable clinics. When they began in 1999, the research told them that the population negatively viewed VCT,

since low cost antiretroviral drugs were not available and stigma was rampant against those who were tested. PSI then tried to turn the idea of VCT into a positive experience using the slogan, "Make a new start today." They pointedly made efforts to ensure that the nine core needs were addressed and advertised quick, confidential, and quality services. To date,

more than 300,000 clients have visited some 20 clinics across the country, and each month 12,000 to 13,000 more take the first step in a new start by getting tested for HIV.

*Maryanne Pribila is a member of the Bangkok YouthForce and a program officer for Family Health International.*

## Media: Hype or Help?

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that more teens are visiting Web sites and calling hotlines to get even more information, and are sharing their new knowledge with their peers. These are critical steps to encouraging safe and responsible sexual behavior.

It is exciting to see the media taking positive steps to educate and empower people in the United States and around the world who might not otherwise have access to sexual

health information, particularly because youth are a vulnerable group, at high risk for HIV.

For more information, please visit:

- [www.itsyoursexlife.com](http://www.itsyoursexlife.com)
- [www.fightforyourrights.mtv.com](http://www.fightforyourrights.mtv.com)
- [www.staying-alive.org](http://www.staying-alive.org)

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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.

**For information on the Bangkok YouthForce during the conference :**

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**After the conference:**

*Claudia Ruland or Hally Mabler—01-703-516-9779*

## Fourth Day of Conference Focuses on Youth, Women

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said, "Powerful education does not merely tinker with what "is" but rather gives the skills to use education to dream about, imagine, and finally achieve what should and could be."

In many parts of the world, young people are educating themselves and their peers and demanding a leadership role in services and programs that serve them. In his plenary speech, Raoul Fransen of the Young Positives Foundation in the Netherlands called for the inclusion of youth in the fight against HIV/AIDS. "We are not asking for understanding; we want to participate," he said. Involvement must not be restricted to conferences and meetings."

A second youth leader, Ricky Tonbing from the Delhi Network of Positive People in India, added, "We need to invest all the resources, we need to young people, because young people are the future."

For the first time in the history of the International AIDS Conference, young people played an active role organizing various sessions and activities related to the conference. Lively discussion and debate on the issues of the day and the problems of youth infected and affected by HIV was heard in the youth lounge of the Global Village. Young peoples' voices were also heard in numerous sessions. The youth program was planned by and for young people who are determined to find their own solutions, and to foster the exchange of ideas and experiences with other young people around the world.

*Courtesy—Communications Department, XV International AIDS Conference.*

## Adults Affirm Importance of Youth

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discuss the detrimental consequences of injection drug use with their children. The majority of HIV/AIDS cases throughout Russia and Ukraine occur via drug injection. Alcohol abuse and a lack of opportunities makes way for careless drug use and, subsequently, rapid spread of HIV/AIDS among young people.

Sienrasute returned to the notion of young people as active participants in AIDS work, through her discussion of her work as a Buddhist monk who conducts sex education programs for youth. Sienrasute stressed the value of discussing love with sex and explaining how everyone must deal with sex, but we must learn to manage with it with our minds and souls. Religious leaders must educate youth and work together with them so that they understand love and sex as an integrated concept. Buddhist monks should also teach young people how to deal with life without suffering.

Said Sienrasute, "Youth are the leaders of the world – they are the best investment that you can make!"

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