

Global AIDS Week of Action- 2008

MAY 2008

Candlelight Memorial Begins in Lilongwe, Malawi

SAAIDS Southern Africa
HIV/AIDS Information
Dissemination Service



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MALAWI—The 25th Anniversary of the International AIDS Candlelight Memorial, a program of the Global Health Council, was held on May 18, 2008, in 115 countries.

The Candlelight Opening Ceremony was held in Lilongwe, Malawi, where President Bingu wa Mutharika lit the ceremonial first candle to kick off global events.

The former president of the Republic of Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda, also attended the Candlelight Memorial at Civo Stadium and encouraged people and governments to be open and honest about the HIV and AIDS crisis in their countries.

President Mutharika called upon the thousands of Malawians attending the event to go for voluntary testing and counseling if they don't already know their HIV status. Malawi's president also congratulated civil society organizations in Malawi for being strong



President of the Republic of Malawi Bingu wa Mutharika (center) lights the ceremonial candle at the Opening Ceremony of the International AIDS Candlelight Memorial in Lilongwe, Malawi. Joining him are the Minister of Health Khumbo Kachali (left) and Mary Shawa, Secretary for Nutrition and HIV and AIDS in the Office of the President (right).

advocates for improved HIV and AIDS prevention, care and treatment programs.

Also speaking at the Opening Ceremony was Maurice Middleberg, vice president for policy of the Global Health Council, and other dignitaries in Malawi. Middleberg congratulated Malawi's civil society organizations and the national government for creating a strong partnership in the fight against HIV and AIDS and setting an example for other sub-Saharan Afri-

can countries.

Malawi was selected to host the Candlelight Memorial's Opening Ceremony because of the leadership demonstrated by the Malawi Network of People Living with HIV and AIDS (MANET+), a nongovernmental umbrella organization for more than 400 HIV and AIDS support groups throughout the country.

<http://www.candlelightmemorial.org/anniversary/ceremony/>

'Identify positive aspects in fight against HIV'

By Chronicle Reporter

ZIMBABWE—PEOPLE should identify positive aspects of their culture which they can then use to help in their fight against HIV and AIDS.

This was said during the Global AIDS Week of Action commemorations at the National Art Gallery in Bulawayo yesterday.

Prior to the proceedings, Pastor Sarah Nyathi gave a short sermon before candles were lit in memory of those who died of HIV and AIDS.

Speaking at the occasion, historian and author Mr Pathisa Nyathi said culture could be used as a tool to fight HIV and AIDS if positive aspects of culture were identified.

"People can identify that which can assist in fighting the scourge by looking at culture and identifying positive things within that culture. It can also be resisted through beliefs and values," said Mr Nyathi.

He said to effectively fight HIV and AIDS people should stick to their values and avoid cultural practices that fuelled HIV and AIDS.

The event was held to discuss issues on women, culture and HIV and AIDS. People from organisations such as the Community Working Group, Zimbabwe Women Lawyers' Association, church leaders and AIDS activists graced the occasion.

Ms Caroline Mubaira, the programme manager of the Community Working Group, said there was a need for transparency by stakeholders to address issues pertaining to HIV and AIDS.

"We call for equality in the health sector. We call for transparency by all stakeholders and accessible ARV (anti-retroviral) treatment and health facilities," said Ms Mubaira.

Reverend Paul Bayethe Damasane, who represented the church, said it was high time churches spoke openly about HIV and AIDS.

He said there was a tendency by most pastors to avoid the subject.

"In order for us to address the issue effectively pastors in all churches have to speak openly about the virus. It is important that they talk about the issue the same way they would when a person dies in a car crash," said Rev Damasane.

He said it would be difficult to address the issue of HIV and AIDS if the church did not take the initiative.

"It would be difficult to address the issue if the church does not talk about it. Christianity would be weak if we do not respect culture as culture also speaks of abstinence. We pretend as if there is no HIV in the church. When people talk

about it in the church we believe that God is judging people who have it because we think that they have sinned," said Rev Damasane.

Global AIDS Week of Action is commemorated annually in May.

<http://www.chronicle.co.zw/inside.aspx?sectid=92&cat=1>

Facts

- The Candlelight Memorial is a program of the Global Health Council.
- It's the largest and oldest grassroots mobilisation campaign for HIV and AIDS awareness in the world.
- The purpose is to honor all those affected by the AIDS pandemic, as well as to educate about HIV and AIDS, influence local and national policy makers, and create community dialogue about HIV and AIDS prevention, care and treatment.
- It's led by local volunteer "Candlelight coordinators," who host memorials for their communities worldwide.
- The Candlelight Memorial occurs on the third Sunday in May every year.
- The Candlelight Memorial is committed to ending HIV and AIDS by raising awareness and advocating for the advancement of effective policies at all levels.

'Never give up, never forget'

By Jynx Jenkins

MARTINSBURG — Judith Friend rarely attends the all-too-frequent funerals of those she helps on a daily basis.

As executive director of the AIDS Network based in Martinsburg, the privacy of Friend's clients trumps any desire she may have to mourn in a traditional sense.

Sadly, in the nine years Friend has been at the AIDS Network, she has had to make this choice 56 times.

"That's a lot in nine years," she says with obvious emotion. "It would be one thing if they were just names, but they're not — they're people I've seen every day, worked with, grown close to."

But Friend will be able to pay tribute to those lives lost, along with community members, from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. Sunday during AIDS Walk and candlelight memorial.

This walk and ceremony will join The Global Health Council's 25th annual International AIDS Candlelight Memorial program — the oldest and largest grassroots campaign for HIV and AIDS awareness in the world. According to the Global Health Network's memorial Web site, 2007 saw more than 2,000 candlelight memorials in 119 countries.

However, 2007's Martinsburg ceremony saw a meager 20 participants. This sense of complacency is at odds with the growing number of Americans in-



Candles line a brick wall at War Memorial Park during the 2006 AIDS Walk & Candlelight Memorial. (Journal file photo)

ected with HIV, yet Friend and her staff of three continue to offer services and counseling to those infected in Berkeley and Jefferson counties, as well as maintaining a prevention outreach in eight counties total.

Friend learned at a recent conference that in the past 10 years there were 40,000 new cases of HIV per year. That is, until 2007, when 57,000 new cases were documented. Friend says it is estimated that another one-third of that amount are infected and don't know it. Even with an increase in infection, programs — like those offered by the AIDS Network — are being slashed.

"You're not hearing as much about the disease as you once did," Friend says. "Funding is being cut and services are being lost."

Currently, the AIDS Network receives Ryan White, Title I federal funds, which it allocates to assist clients in paying for life's neces-

sities — emergency food vouchers, utility and rental assistance, mental health services, nutritional supplements and transportation — which may be difficult, sometimes impossible, to balance with their disease and treatment.

The organization currently serves 100 individuals with an average of 20 new clients each year. Friend says the population of clients — 50 percent white and 50 percent persons of color — is disproportionate to the local figures with the areas being served having only a 6 percent minority population.

Also, Friend says that in the past many of their referrals were from the Veterans Affairs Medical Center or other such programs, which brought clients from outside the local area. But now, the AIDS Network sees more and more clients native to the local area.

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'Never give up, never forget'

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This is one of the reasons Friend, and other candlelight memorial organizers around the globe, recognize the importance of these events — though the primary focus is to remember lives lost, the walk and memorial is also a way to reach out to community and begin a dialogue about HIV prevention and treatment, as well as the proximity of the disease and services for those infected.

"It's to raise awareness," Friend says. "Somewhere out here in Martinsburg there is someone who is infected. We could be helping with bills, transportation — we could be improving their quality of life."

Friend and her staff are also passionate about education — letting the community know that their organization does free, private testing for anyone, ages 14 and older, who may have risk factors such as multiple sex partners, unprotected sex with any partner, sharing of drug paraphernalia, tattoos and piercings or men that engage in

sex with men. "We have loads of information and we go wherever we are invited to speak," she says.

The organisation has the responsibility of educating people of all ages within 3,469 square miles and has presented in classrooms and health fairs and helped organize anonymous testing on area college campuses.

However, Friend says she finds the requests dropping off and visits to her table at health fairs or other events are short or avoided altogether, attributed in part to the stigma most people attach to even learning about HIV risk or effects. The same issue, she feels, affects attendance at the annual AIDS Walk. "It's not something that makes people feel warm and fuzzy," she says.

In spite of the stigma, the facts about the disease are hard to avoid — regardless of race, class, age or lifestyle. According to the Web site of "Until There's a Cure," an organization promoting awareness, prevention education and research funding, individuals age 25 or

younger make up half of all new infections in the United States. One million people now live with HIV in the United States and 40,000 are added each year. More than 22 million people have lost their lives to AIDS since its discovery in 1981.

The theme of the 25th annual international memorial is "Never Give Up, Never Forget." Those who participate this year will walk to show their support and commemorate the losses with a candlelight ceremony and a symbolic balloon release — one for each AIDS Network client lost in the past year.

As Friend says, it takes "only one small hour of your day," for community members to show families, friends and neighbors of those who have been affected, that they support the ongoing fight to beat the growing disease and they will never forget those that have been lost.

http://www.journal-news.net/page/content_detail/id/506631.html

Churches to Support HIV Positive People

Church leaders and communities have been urged to play a more active role in supporting those infected with HIV and AIDS.

Gauteng Health MEC Brian Hlongwa said churches must not vilify people with HIV and AIDS. "They can pray and remind them that they are still children of God and give them love and support," said Mr Hlongwa.

He was speaking during a memorial service held in Soshanguve to remember those who had died of AIDS, on Sunday.

The memorial service marked the end of Care Week which was held to lend support to those who are battling with the virus as well as encourage the care givers and community health workers who take care of them.

The event also seeks to change the stigma surrounding HIV and AIDS and to work towards the pledge of a world without AIDS.

Mr Hlongwa encouraged people to take responsibility of their own lives.

"There are about 400 new infections daily and the best thing one can do is to abstain from sex and if they cannot, they must use protection," Mr Hlongwa said.

He said that many people were still leading unhealthy lifestyles. Acknowledging caregivers, Mr Hlongwa said: "Your role is crucial in the fight against HIV and AIDS, nothing helps them recover more than your love, care and support."

<http://allafrica.com/stories/200805191005.html>

Global AIDS Week 2008 Begins

A candle-light walk and memorial service on Sunday led the Liberian segment of the Global AIDS Week 2008.

The walk began concurrently from the Catholic Hospital and Nigeria House intersections on Tubman Boulevard and move to the SOS Clinic, opposite Sophie's, where the service was held.

The coordinator of the activities, ActionAid HIV/Focal Person Elizabeth Dato-Gbah in a release said the week of activities will also involve people living with and affected by AIDS participating in a two-day widespread community outreach activity, which will help spread messages about the effects of HIV and AIDS in our community, and lay the basis for enhanced public information.

According to the release, the outreach will cover high-risk communities, including Slipway, West Point and central Monrovia area.

The week is also expected to include a round table involving government officials and representatives of NGOs and development organizations and the community at large; as well as a parade, where a statement of concern will be presented to members of the Liberian legislature.

The week is meant to focus on the severe impact of the AIDS

pandemic on families, communities and economies the world over.

Activities in Liberia will seek to fight off stigma and discrimination, and garner government's commitment to providing access to medication and support for people living with AIDS.

At present, AIDS continues to kill almost 6000 people each day and more than 2 out of 3 HIV positive people still lack access to treatment.

While women make up an increasing proportion of those living with HIV and bear a greater burden of care, current AIDS responses do not tackle the violation of women's rights - a key driver of the pandemic.

For the past two years during the Global AIDS Week of Action, activists have organised actions in over 30 countries to hold world leaders accountable on their landmark commitment to fight AIDS made at the United National General Assembly Special Session on AIDS (UNGASS) in 2001.

In 2005 world leaders made another historic promise on universal access, committing to: "developing and implementing a package for HIV prevention, treatment and care with the aim of coming as close as possible to the goal of universal access to treatment by 2010."

According to ActionAid, "The world needs to honor this ambitious promise to stop the needless deaths of women, men and children. Our governments must meet their national targets for universal access to treatment prevention, care and support. Multinational drug companies must stop putting profits before people. Rich nations, including the G8, must back their warm words on AIDS with real funds."

"The Global AIDS Week of Action is the defining mobilisation moment before world leaders report back to the UN on the progress they have made to meet their commitments on HIV and AIDS."

<http://allafrica.com/stories/200805200886.html>

If you have any comments about any of the articles in this newsletter, please feel free to forward them to the following e-mail address :- mediadesk@saf aids.org.zw

Malawi launches 2008 International Aids Candlelight Memorial

APA-Lilongwe (Malawi) Malawi President Bingu wa Mutharika has appealed to the International community to be part of the solution in the fight against HIV and AIDS pandemic in the world.

Speaking when he launched the 2008 and 25th International AIDS Candlelight Memorial in his capital Lilongwe, Mutharika said AIDS continued to be a development and human catastrophe which required concerted efforts of all nations.

"Countries need to act responsibly, diligently and abide by their commitments if the disease is to be reduced," he told an international audience that included former President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, an Aids fighter in his own right.

Mutharika said the degree, gravity, grades and depths of HIV/Aids has differed from one country to

another, and one continent to another, but the effects of it are the same because all countries have been affected.

The president said this year's theme, "Never Give Up, Never Forget," was important for Malawi because it cut across all social levels to take the lead in the fight against the disease.

He noted Malawi was one of the countries negatively affected by the effects of HIV and AIDS pandemic in Southern Africa. Therefore, he said, the event Candlelight Memorial intensified a commitment to renew government's efforts in the fight against the disease.

Global Health Council Vice President Morris Mildalburg commended Malawi for its progress in responding to the disease. "Countries should learn from Malawi in building nations

and a world free from HIV and AIDS," he said.

Earlier, Kaunda, who lost a son to Aids in 1986, urged countries to join hands in order to save people from the death trap of the disease. "Let us call for action by all to remain steadfast and determined if we need to reduce the disease in our communities," he said.

He added that testing, counselling and prevention are important aspects of fighting against the disease.

The AIDS Candlelight Memorial is among the oldest and largest grassroots mobilisation campaigns for HIV and AIDS awareness. It started in United States of America 25 years ago, and this is the first time the event has been launched outside America.

<http://www.apanews.net/apa.php?article64013>

Global HIV AIDS Week of Action Ends

By Ibrahim Tarawallie

National Coalition of HIV and AIDS in Sierra Leone Saturday ended its global HIV and AIDS week of action with a fun fair for school children and youth groups across the country.

The celebration, which started on Monday May 19, ended at the national stadium hostel in Freetown with a programme geared towards educating pupils about HIV and AIDS. It attracted

over 200 pupils from different schools.

Representative of Action Aid Sierra Leone, Alice James said it was important for pupils in schools to have better knowledge about HIV and AIDS.

She said the disease became popular in the country in 1988 when the first Sierra Leonean was tested positive for HIV and AIDS and explained how

one can be affected with the disease.

Representing Network of People Living with HIV and AIDS, Harry Alpha called for a stop to stigmatization of those living with the disease. He said it was necessary for children and youths in the country to have more information about the dangers of having the dreadful HIV and AIDS.

<http://allafrica.com/stories/200805270491.html>

Time to remember

By Gloria Ganyani

Every third Sunday in May, people from all walks of life take time off their busy schedules to gather, honour and remember all the people who have passed on as a result of HIV and AIDS related illnesses.

The event began in 1983 when a few men in San Francisco decided to hold a memorial and march to bring public attention to a mysterious disease that was causing early and unexplained deaths. It is now widely known as the International Candlelight memorial.

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For more information please contact :

Beatrice Tonhodzayi
SAfAIDS

Media Resource Desk
17 Beveridge road
Avondale, Harare
Zimbabwe

Phone: +263 4 336193/4 307098

Fax: +263 4 336195

Email:

mediadesk@safaids.org.zw

Website :

www.mediaresourcedesk.org

Please visit our website
www.mediaresourcedesk.org.zw

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This year, the world commemorated the 25th International Candlelight memorial in Lilongwe, Malawi on Sunday, 18 May. The event was co-hosted by the Malawi Network of People Living with HIV and AIDS (MANET) and the Global Health Council. This was the first time the memorial was commemorated in Africa. The theme for this year's memorial was 'Never give up, Never forget'. The theme encouraged everyone not to lose hope and to continue fighting the AIDS pandemic.

The memorial also marked the beginning of the Global AIDS Week of Action which took place from 18 to 24 May. The week provided an opportunity for HIV and AIDS activists to unite, generate political pressure and demand a stronger response from world leaders in the fight against HIV and AIDS. It is also an opportunity to educate people about HIV and AIDS.

"We want to commemorate and remember people who have passed on and people who are infected and affected by HIV and AIDS especially women and girls, said Evince Mugumbate, the Information Manager for the Women and AIDS Support Network.

"Women and girls constitute a large number of people infected and affected by HIV and AIDS and therefore, the memorial and the Global AIDS Week of Action is a time for us to assess progress on what we have done and where we are going, in an effort to empower women so that we reduce the infection rates," said Mugumbate.

According to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) December

2007 AIDS epidemic, a total of 22.5 million were living with HIV in 2007 in sub-Saharan Africa and women constituted about 61 percent.

People therefore need to ensure that women's rights are protected. Violation of women's rights through various means is a key driver to the spread of HIV and AIDS. In the past years, community advocacy was centred on themes around reducing stigma and discrimination, ensuring access to prevention, treatment, care and support and increasing resources for combating HIV and AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis.

"When we light candles, we are celebrating different work and activities being done by People Living with HIV and all the other stakeholders to prevent new infections and advocate for the scaling up of HIV Prevention, treatment, support and care services," said Tendai Westerhof, an HIV and AIDS activist. "We are saluting both men and women who have come out in the open and disclosed their HIV status thereby breaking the silence and fighting stigma," she said.

While acknowledging that the candlelight memorial is a time to remember people who have passed on as a result of HIV and AIDS, SAfAIDS Executive Director, Mrs Lois Chingandu said, "It is not enough to remember but to take action as well. We must ask ourselves what have we done? Drugs are now available and there is no reason for people to die of AIDS today. We need to make a difference. We must continue to lobby the government so that people in need of ARVS get them."