

UGANDA AIDS COMMISSION HOSTS THE MEETING OF THE SPOUSES' OF COMMON WEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT

Uganda AIDS Commission and partners are privileged to host the Spouses of the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting (CHOGM) on **24th November 2007**, at the Uganda AIDS Commission offices in Ntinda.

This is yet, another opportunity for Uganda to share with the international community; her experience about the AIDS epidemic and the country's response over the last 2 decades. Globally, Uganda has been recognized for her modest success in turning the tide of the epidemic and reducing the adult prevalence rate from a peak of 18% in 1992 to the current 6.4%.

Uganda's achievement is a contribution of various partners who responded to the Multi-sectoral strategy, under a committed political leadership, that led prevention campaigns across the country. Mrs. Janet Museveni, the First lady of Uganda, is one of those who responded promptly and set up a home for the children orphaned by HIV/AIDS, known as the, "Uganda Women's Efforts to Save Orphans" (UWESO). As early as 1992, the First Lady also founded the Uganda Youth Forum aimed at reaching young people with the message of abstinence from pre-marital sex and faithfulness before and during marriage and at the same time equip parents, teachers and civil society to support the youth to value abstinence. Other interventions have targeted Rural Women Empowerment.

Many First ladies are involved in similar programs in their countries; and in Africa, the First ladies formed a regional initiative known as, "The Organization of African First Ladies Against AIDS" (OAFLA) that seeks to address HIV/AIDS. OAFLA collaborates with the governments of the African countries as well

as HIV/AIDS stakeholders, to raise awareness about the epidemic and financial support for HIV/AIDS interventions in their countries. These initiatives have mainly addressed the needs of vulnerable groups among them; women, the youth and children.

The Days' Deliberations

In a two-hour session, UAC and partners will share highlights of the national experience along four thematic areas of; Prevention, Care and Treatment; and social support. Presentations shall address: the country's response to the epidemic and the Strategic direction for the country over the next 5 years".

Subsequent presentations will address Anti-retroviral treatment and HIV/AIDS management with specific reference to pediatric treatment of HIV/AIDS; Vaccine development; HIV/AIDS care and support and the role of Civil Society in the response.

A personal testimony of a young person born and living with HIV/AIDS shall be another main feature of the presentations.

The Joint Clinical Research Centre (JCRC), International Diseases Institute (IDI) affiliated to the main national referral hospital Mulago; and The AIDS Support Organization (TASO) will be key presenters.

The high-tech exhibition

The day's presentations will be preceded by a high-tech exhibition that will feature a documentary with interventions in the HIV/AIDS partnership, drawn from the HIV/AIDS thematic areas in prevention, care and treatment and social support. The documentary will highlight Uganda's early interventions in the 1980's up to the present age that is promising and full of hope due to improvements made in the above areas; particularly with the introduction of anti-retroviral therapy. Participating organizations that will represent the HIV/AIDS partnership

include: UWESO, TASO, YEAH, Makerere University John Hopkins University MU-MJU, REACH-OUT MBUYA, NAPHOPHANU, THETA, Walter Reed Vaccine Project, IAVI, Quality Chemicals, etc. The exhibitors will also prepare simple fliers to provide information about their activities. CDs ROMs of both the exhibition and presentations will be packaged for the First ladies' to carry with them back home.

Viewing of HIV/AIDS Spots

At the same function more information on selected HIV/AIDS spots will be shown, just before the presentations begin. It will be memorable, as you listen to the voices of the heroes who stood and **"faced the challenge"** with a vision that one day, **Society will be free of HIV/AIDS**. This vision is very much alive and Uganda AIDS Commission continues to hold the banner up.

The First Ladies' session will be brief, informative, exciting and challenging; carrying the message of the day which emphasizes the fact that, the Commonwealth leadership still has a big role to play in combating the tide of the epidemic.

The CHOGM theme of, **"Transforming Commonwealth societies to achieve political, economic and human development"** is a process that can only be effected in a holistic manner. HIV/AIDS has long been identified as a developmental issue that has transformed political agendas of nations, by shifting priorities, nipped the once stable and growing economies of developing nations, and disintegrated its social fabric. The impact of the epidemic is extensive and devastating, and can only be matched by a wholistic approach at global, regional, national and sub-national levels. The leadership of CHOGM has the opportunity to address HIV/AIDS at all those levels, by articulating and integrating HIV/AIDS in the transformation process.

From the HIV/AIDS perspective, we still face a challenge of transforming knowledge into behavior change. The cornerstone of addressing the epidemic in Uganda remains the prevention of new infections. Societies must be supported to transform knowledge into viable prevention and control programmes. Basically this translates into providing universal access to prevention, treatment, care and support for all those affected. In the new National Strategic Plan (NSP) 2007/08- 2011/12, Uganda has prioritized its goals as follows:

- Adopting prevention strategies that will reduce new infections by 40% by 2012.
- Improving the quality of life of people living with AIDS by addressing the health effects of the epidemic (increasing access to care and treatment).
- Mitigating the social, cultural and economic effects of the epidemic including issues of vulnerability, gender, conflict areas etc
- Strengthening effective support systems to ensure timely and equitable access to service delivery.

Uganda is optimistic that it will achieve the set targets at the end of the 5-year plan in 2012. Indeed the new National Strategic Plan for HIV/AIDS and the CHOGM event in Uganda, are key milestones that usher in renewed commitment to achieve political, economic and human development for our society. We are ready to embrace transformation as we join hands with Commonwealth nations and the rest of the world to eradicate HIV/AIDS from our midst.

TOGETHER WE SHARE THE CHALLENGE