



# STOP DISCRIMINATION AIDS

YOUTH INITIATIVE  
ON HIV/AIDS  
AND HUMAN RIGHTS

SOCIAL AND HUMAN SCIENCES SECTOR



# **YOUTH INITIATIVE ON HIV/AIDS AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

**The Youth Initiative on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights was launched by UNESCO, a co-sponsor of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the UNAIDS Secretariat. The Initiative aims to help empower young people to take action in their communities against the spread of HIV and the stigma and discrimination related to it. The Initiative employs a participatory approach involving students and youth organizations, and brings together training and action focusing on youth, human rights, HIV and AIDS.**

# WHY DID WE LAUNCH THIS INITIATIVE?

## WHY YOUTH?

**In all regions of the world, young people are among the most affected by HIV and AIDS.**

Half of all new HIV infections occur among young people aged 15 to 24. More than 10 million young people in this age group are already living with HIV. In some places in the world, young women are more likely to become infected with HIV than young men, with young women being the group with the highest rates of infection. Given the particular vulnerability of young people to HIV infection and the very fast rates of infection among them, it is essential that young people become empowered to protect themselves in the context of the HIV epidemic.

Though young people are particularly vulnerable to HIV infection, at the same time they have greater potential than adults to learn what they need to know about HIV and to change their behaviour so as to protect themselves from infection, overcome the harmful stigma and discrimination related to HIV, and if infected, get treatment and live with HIV successfully. The life skills and education that young people can acquire and the attitudes that they can adopt not only determine their fate, but also represent our hope to overcome the epidemic.

Should I care about AIDS?



## THE UNITED NATIONS COMMITMENT

Member States of the United Nations have acknowledged the significant role and contribution of people living with HIV/AIDS, young people and civil society actors in the response to HIV/AIDS and declared that "recognizing... their full involvement and participation in the design, planning, implementation and evaluation of programmes is crucial to the development of effective responses to the HIV/AIDS epidemic".

Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, para. 33. United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS 25-27 June 2001.

Really?



**AN EFFECTIVE RESPONSE TO HIV AND AIDS IS A RIGHTS-BASED RESPONSE. PROTECTION AND FULFILMENT OF CIVIL, CULTURAL, ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RIGHTS IS ESSENTIAL TO:**

- reduce vulnerability to HIV and AIDS;
- lessen the adverse impact on those infected and affected; and
- empower individuals and communities to respond to the epidemic.

**"REALIZATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS FOR ALL IS ESSENTIAL TO REDUCE VULNERABILITY TO HIV/AIDS."**

Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS: "HIV/AIDS and human rights", pp. 24. United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS 25-27 June 2001.

## WHY A HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH?

**A human rights framework plays a crucial role in empowering people, including young women and men, to respond to the epidemic. This is because:**

### **Vulnerability to HIV infection is increased:**

When discrimination and other human rights violations prevent people from being able to avoid HIV infection. This includes the rights of young women and men to be free of discrimination based on age, sex and other grounds; to be free from violence, including sexual violence and coercion; and to receive the education, information and access to services and commodities they need to avoid HIV.

### **The negative impact of HIV and AIDS is significantly reduced:**

When people are able to enjoy their rights to privacy, education, information, health care, including HIV treatment, social support, employment, non-discrimination and equality, including between women and men.

For these reasons, the spread of HIV and AIDS is disproportionately high among groups that already suffer from a lack of human rights protection, that are subjected to social and economic discrimination, or that are marginalized by their legal status.

**Stigma, discrimination and the violation of rights, all undermine efforts to counter the destructive consequences of HIV and AIDS. In order to stop the negative impact of the epidemic, it is essential to confront stigma and discrimination.**

## WHAT IS HIV-RELATED STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION?

**HIV-related stigma and discrimination arise from fear, ignorance, misunderstanding and long-standing taboos about the illness.**

At the same time, they also build upon and reinforce existing negative stereotypes and preconceptions related to sexuality, gender, race and poverty. In fact, stigma and discrimination have a harmful impact not only at the individual level but also in the broader social, cultural, political and economic spheres.

**HIV-related stigma and discrimination cause great personal suffering for people living with HIV and AIDS, and contribute directly to the spread of the epidemic by:**

- causing people to be afraid to seek HIV testing, counselling, treatment and support;
- causing people to fear using safe sex and safe drug-use and behaviours which will reduce mother-to-child transmission because these will identify them as HIV positive;
- resulting in social exclusion and physical violence against those living with HIV, particularly women and girls;
- fostering a culture of secrecy, silence and denial about HIV and AIDS, including a feeling that only “other” or “bad” people are vulnerable to HIV infection;
- compromising the confidentiality and privacy of those seeking more information about their health status; and
- reinforcing existing social inequality and prejudices, such as those associated with gender, sexuality, race and class status, that already make it hard for members of certain groups to get access to HIV prevention and treatment.

**Freedom from discrimination is a human right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in many international and regional human rights instruments.**

These instruments prohibit all forms of discrimination based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, fortune, birth or other status. The UN Commission on Human Rights resolutions (1999/49 and 2001/51) unequivocally stated that the non-discrimination provisions in international

THE UNITED NATIONS  
*HIV/AIDS AND HUMAN RIGHTS*  
INTERNATIONAL GUIDELINES CALL  
ON MEMBER STATES TO TAKE  
RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR FAIR  
SHARE OF REDUCING THE NEGATIVE  
VIEWS SURROUNDING THE VIRUS.

**GUIDELINE 9:**  
“STATES SHOULD PROMOTE  
THE WIDE AND ONGOING  
DISTRIBUTION OF CREATIVE  
EDUCATION, TRAINING  
AND MEDIA PROGRAMMES  
EXPLICITLY DESIGNED TO CHANGE  
ATTITUDES OF DISCRIMINATION  
AND STIGMATIZATION ASSOCIATED  
WITH HIV/AIDS TO UNDERSTANDING  
AND ACCEPTANCE.”

HIV/AIDS and Human Rights  
International Guidelines, OHCHR  
and UNAIDS



human rights texts should be interpreted to cover health status, including HIV and AIDS, and it has confirmed that “discrimination on the basis of HIV/AIDS status, actual or presumed, is prohibited by existing human rights standards”.

Stigma and discrimination can be particularly damaging to young people at a time when they are trying to comprehend their identity and establish their place in the world.

## WHAT CAN YOUNG PEOPLE DO?

**YOUNG PEOPLE – BOTH LIVING WITH OR WITHOUT HIV – HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE TO PLAY IN ACTIVELY COUNTERING DISCRIMINATION IN THEIR COMMUNITIES. FOR EXAMPLE, THEY CAN:**

- encourage responsible behaviour regarding HIV for themselves and others;
- provide support to people living with HIV and AIDS;
- facilitate community dialogue, understanding and collaboration in dealing with the challenges faced by those living with HIV;
- mobilize governments, local authorities and community leaders to address specific concerns of people living with HIV and AIDS;
- develop social and legal services at the local and community levels to improve the quality of life of people living with the virus; and
- set up peer education programmes to improve the support and integration of young people living with HIV and AIDS into their families, their communities and society at large.

Many organizations work in this field at the local, national and regional levels. Contacting them is a good starting point for anyone wanting to become actively engaged. Please refer to the UNESCO/UNAIDS toolkit, *HIV/AIDS and Human Rights: Young People in Action*, which includes resources and contact information, and is available at: [www.unesco.org/hiv/human\\_rights](http://www.unesco.org/hiv/human_rights)

# WHAT IS THE YOUTH INITIATIVE ON HIV/AIDS AND HUMAN RIGHTS?

Many young people are already involved in HIV and human rights activities and contribute substantially to projects in these areas. Yet much still remains to be done. Not only are most young people ignorant about HIV and how to avoid infection, but many of those who are informed lack the enabling tools, capabilities and opportunities to take action.

UNESCO, in partnership with the UNAIDS Secretariat, therefore launched an initiative that promotes a human rights framework as a tool for youth empowerment. The human rights approach of the Initiative is implemented through consultations with youth activists and in a format in which they themselves can take ownership. The objective is for young people to identify how human rights affect their daily lives in the context of HIV. In particular, young people and young leaders discover how HIV and AIDS are related to their human rights and why a rights-based approach is essential to reduce the spread and impact of HIV and AIDS.

## The Initiative contributes to

- raising awareness and understanding of HIV-related discrimination among young people, particularly among organized youth groups (youth and student organizations); and
- promoting youth participation and involvement in HIV and human rights action.

## In practice, the Initiative

- organizes consultations and needs assessments among youth organizations and experts on HIV and human rights issues;
- produces youth-friendly information, education, communication and resource materials;
- holds workshops for youth leaders on HIV and human rights issues; and
- supports youth-led initiatives that seek to respect and protect the human rights of people living with HIV, and those vulnerable to HIV transmission.

Within the framework of the Initiative, a joint UNESCO/UNAIDS toolkit was published in 2001: *HIV/AIDS and Human Rights, Young People in Action*.

It is a resource handbook for young people providing ideas for youth action on human rights and HIV. It was prepared in close consultation with young people from various youth organizations, in particular with students from the International Federation of Medical Students' Association and the International Pharmaceutical Students' Federation.

Using the toolkit, subregional youth-led training workshops on HIV and Human Rights have been conducted for Africa (Cape Town, South Africa and Yaoundé, Cameroon), Asia (Bandung, Indonesia), the Middle East (Beirut, Lebanon), and Latin America (Lima, Peru). More than 400 youth leaders have been trained to provide information and to carry out projects within their communities.



## YOUTH-LED PROJECTS SUPPORTED BY THE INITIATIVE



### BANGLADESH

#### TRAINING IMAMS TO CONFRONT DISCRIMINATION

Although more than half of all Bangladeshis have never been to school, nearly everybody regularly attends their local Mosque. In a population with a largely insufficient understanding of HIV and AIDS, religious leaders (imams) have a crucial role to play against the spread of the virus and in countering the stigmatization, discrimination and vulnerability of people living with HIV and AIDS.

**Against this background, the project developed by the Grambangla Unnayan Committee has:**

- provided 150 imams with two-day training workshops;
- assisted imams in distributing information on HIV prevention in their communities; and
- organized sessions on "HIV/AIDS, Health & Society" with imams and women participants to focus specifically on gender issues.

Bangladeshi people living with HIV and AIDS were actively involved in the project and discussed their daily life and problems.

**In partnership with:** South Asia Youth Action (SAYA), Ministry of Religious Affairs of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Islamic Foundation of Bangladesh and local government institutions.

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## MALAWI

MOBILIZING  
COMMUNITIES  
AGAINST STIGMA

The Youth Development Foundation raises awareness and sensitivity among young people in the Machinjiri Blantyre district about HIV and AIDS related stigma and discrimination.

**To this end, the project that they carried out in schools and community centres consisted of:**

- participative training;
- peer counselling;
- educational workshops; and
- training for health care providers.

They placed a premium on emphasizing a human rights approach and on securing the involvement of young people living with HIV and AIDS in their activities. The project benefited from the participation of various influential community leaders and local authorities throughout the planning and execution stages.

**In partnership with:** Matindi Youth Organisation (MATYO), Centre for Youth and Children Affairs (CEYCA), Malawi Human Rights Commission (MHRC), Malawi Network of AIDS Service Organisation (MANASO).

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## MOZAMBIQUE

CAMPAIGNING WITH  
YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN  
RURAL COMMUNITIES

Action Aid Mozambique addresses the persistent discrimination against people living with HIV and AIDS in rural areas of the country, where access to accurate HIV information is severely limited. In this regard, they launched a project focusing on youth leadership development, peer education and information campaigns.

**The project:**

- focused on young people in rural areas;
- emphasized respect for local cultural values and practices;
- launched discussions about sensitive issues such as sexuality and gender; and
- held workshops to assist people living with HIV and AIDS.

**In partnership with:** Kindlimuka, Women, Law and Development

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## SRI LANKA

PARTICIPATORY  
EDUCATION  
ON HIV/AIDS AND  
HUMAN RIGHTS

In recognition of the vulnerabilities facing the Sri Lankan population concerning the spread of HIV and AIDS, the *Institute for Development of Community Strengths* raises awareness among young people.

**In the Matara District, the project has:**

- collaborated with local youth groups;
- sponsored open discussions on HIV and human rights issues;
- trained peer educators to fight against discrimination; and
- provided youth leaders with information booklets about the rights of people living with the virus.

**In partnership with:** Sri Lankan Department of Health

**Contact Information:**  
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## ZAMBIA

UNIVERSITY  
ACTIVISM FOR  
AWARENESS,  
VOLUNTARY TESTING  
AND COUNSELLING

Given the powerful role that university campuses play in shaping the perspectives of youth, especially young leaders, this project focused on HIV and AIDS awareness in two Zambian universities: the University of Zambia and Copperbelt University.

**The project has:**

- undertaken a series of open discussions and workshops;
- sponsored creative and artistic events, such as student talk shows, theatrical performances and video presentations;
- developed educational activities and information pamphlets to encourage students to undergo voluntary testing and counselling;
- equipped HIV-positive students with substantial background information about the virus and their rights; and
- educated potential Zambian employers about the moral and legal implications of discriminating against university students and other people living with HIV and AIDS.

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## ZAMBIA

ADVOCATING  
TOLERANCE OVER  
THE RADIO WAVES

By using a radio station popular among young Zambians as a platform, this project contributed to reducing stigma, discrimination and silence surrounding HIV and AIDS.

**The weekly radio programme has:**

- included aspects of youth culture into its shows in order to tackle HIV-related human rights issues;
- broadcast interviews and discussions about the rights of people living with the virus;
- featured a different HIV-positive guest on each show who could speak about personal experiences; and
- advocated for improved social policies to support the rights of people living with the virus, such as improved access to anti-retroviral medication and fair treatment in the workplace.

**In partnership with:** Zambia Integrated Health Program, Network of People Living with AIDS, National AIDS Council of Zambia, Permanent Human Rights Commission, Ministry of Youth Sports and Child Development, Zambia National Broadcasting and Television, Africare Zambia, Society for Family Health (PSI Zambia).

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# HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN THE INITIATIVE

We wish to build upon our experience and extend the Initiative and its activities to other regions and to different cultural and local contexts with new partners. We look forward to hearing from student organizations, youth NGOs, associations and institutions. Please contact us to share your experiences, and to learn more about the Initiative and its capacity-building workshops.



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Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS

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