

## **In SHARP Focus at the International AIDS Conference 2006**

Editor: Susana T. Fried ([susana.fried@gmail.com](mailto:susana.fried@gmail.com)). Assistant Editor: Marissa Hildebrandt ([marissahilde@yahoo.com](mailto:marissahilde@yahoo.com)). Editor's note: **In SHARP Focus at the International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2006)** is an initiative of the OSI/SHARP (sexual health and rights project). Its purpose is to provide information about key sexual health and rights issues, activities, and debates (paying particular attention to those addressing sex workers, men who have sex with men and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons – or, in new terminology 'same sex practicing individuals') as these emerge during AIDS 2006. In SHARP Focus is directed toward those attending the conference as well as those who are not. It will include interviews, event reports, analyses and a schedule of key upcoming events. For more information or to share events, strategies and activities, please contact Susana T. Fried at [susana.fried@gmail.com](mailto:susana.fried@gmail.com), Marissa Hildebrandt at [marissahilde@yahoo.com](mailto:marissahilde@yahoo.com) or Rachel Thomas, OSI/SHARP at [rthomas@orosny.org](mailto:rthomas@orosny.org).

PLEASE FEEL FREE TO SEND INFORMATION ABOUT EVENTS, STRATEGIES AND PROPOSED ACTIONS. WE WILL DO OUR BEST TO DISSEMINATE THE INFORMATION.

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### **OVERVIEW: THE OPENING**

The XVI International AIDS Conference (IAC) kicked off tonight at Rogers Stadium with an opening session marked by cheers and jeers (standard fare for international AIDS conferences). Braving long registration lines (running upwards of two hours) and the like, some 20,000+ delegates arrived in Toronto and made their way to the stadium. Cheers went to a number of speakers, including Mark Wainberg of McGill University, past President of the IAS and current co-chair and local host, Fricka Chia Iskander of APN+, and Bill and Melinda Gates. The crowd showed their support to Dr. Wainberg as he chastised Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper for failing to attend the opening session.

Many of the speakers, among them Helen Gayle, outgoing Chair of the IAC, Dr. Wainberg, Dr. Peter Piot and Fricka Chia Iskander, suggested the importance of grappling with sexual health and rights – including those of same sex practicing individuals\* and sex workers -- in emphasizing the importance of fully addressing issues of stigma and discrimination as part of the global AIDS response. Dr. Piot noted in particular the importance of addressing marginalized groups who were not “written in” to the recent Political Declaration adopted during the UN General Assembly Special Session review that took place in May and June of this year – men who have sex with men, injecting drug users, sex workers and orphans. Indeed, speaker after speaker noted the importance of reaching out to marginalized communities. In his keynote, Bill Gates (shared with Melinda), "A woman should never need her partner's permission to save her own life. There's progress on these, but the pace has been too slow." Melinda Gates spoke about how stigma impedes life saving HIV prevention efforts. She noted that government officials

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\* We use the phrase “same sex practicing individuals” to encompass men who have sex with men, women who have sex with women and transgender persons, where appropriate. While the phrase is cumbersome, it accomplishes several important tasks: first, it emphasizes practices over identities – an important feature in working on sexually transmitted infections. Second, it is gender-neutral, encompassing the sexual practices of women, men and transgender persons. Finally, it escapes some of the accumulating connotations that might be associated with the terms “MSM” or “LGBT,” as these are seen to impose identity assumptions on to whom it refers, whether or not they claim those identities

were often unwilling to accompany her and Bill when they wanted to visit sex workers. She also made clear her belief that sex workers must be full partners in fighting AIDS.

Small and sporadic protest erupted during several moments: chants of “Fight AIDS, fund health workers now” could be heard during Dr. Piot’s speech. Sex worker rights advocates protested at the outset of the Gates speech, expressing their concern about a recent Gates Foundation grant of \$5 million dollars to the International Justice Mission, an evangelical organization which engages in anti-trafficking efforts by conducting raids and rescues in brothals and placing these women in rehabilitation centers. Some of the sex workers who have been “rescued” consider themselves to have been kidnapped and have escaped from the rehabilitation centers.

Meena Seshu, Secretary General of SANGRAM, a group in India that works to protect the human rights of sex workers, said, “The solution to trafficking must be multifaceted. We must address the official corruption, indifference and fraud that allow traffickers to move people across borders and sell their services without repercussions. We must also address the root causes of human trafficking: the low social status, poverty and lack of education or other options that traffickers exploit when they trick people into forced labor situations. We must also recognize that many persons become involved in sex work because they live in conditions of poverty and discrimination, and it is the only way they can support their families. Tactics and strategies that further undermine their rights increase their marginalization, rather than allowing them to seek their own solutions.”

#### **REPORT: MSM & HIV: Advancing a Global Agenda for Gay Men and Other Men Who Have Sex with Men pre-conference satellite**

On Thursday, 10 August and Friday 11 August, around 300 individuals launched the “MSM” stream at the AIDS 2006. The satellite session opened key note speaker Peter Tatchell and presentations on HIV prevalence in MSM communities in Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Pacific, the Caribbean, Europe, North America, Latin America, and the Middle East and North Africa. The presentations drove home the glaring contradiction between the scale and scope of HIV/AIDS among men who have sex with men and the lack of consistent attention to this, as evidenced by the fact there is no plenary session and symposium on men who have sex with men at AIDS 2006. The forum emphasized principles of human rights and social justice, strength-based solutions, sex positive approaches, empowerment, involvement, and resources. Diverse speakers included George Aziz From Helem, Lebanese and Dr. Carlos Caceres from Cayetano Heredia University in Peru. Drawing upon his recent research, Dr. Caceres raised a question about the predominant model of “MSM” is not necessarily inclusive of other sexual diversities, particularly among men in the global South. Shivananda Khan, representing the NAZ foundation and the Asia Pacific region (see interview below) elicited wide-ranging reactions by using a “W” after MSM in order to highlight that most men who have sex with men also have sex with women.

Overall, the session emphasized community based approaches, such as using MSM parties and saunas to disseminate information, internet surveys, and “interactive kiosks” which would offer participants free condoms and lubricant. Themes of the session reflected the frequently used phrase - “it’s not who you are, it’s what you do” - as well as addressing the differences between approaching MSM and HIV/AIDS issues from a human rights perspective and/or a public health agenda. Adela Vasquez, the only visibly transgender individual at the session and a former sex worker, spoke in a workshop of the usefulness of the term “MSM” as it focuses on gender performance; she also highlighted the intersectional facets of HIV/AIDS transmission in the transgender and sex worker communities. The brief participation of Dr. Peter Piot, executive director of UNAIDS was well received, as he announced “the agenda is unfinished when it comes to men who have sex with men.” Dr. Piot remarked on the failure of countries to recognize MSM, sex workers, IDUs, and other vulnerable populations as entitled to human rights promotion and protection. He pointed to the fact that some countries have allowed AIDS to slip off the gay agenda, exacerbating the lack of data on this issue. Looking forward to Mexico 2008, Jorge Saavedra of the National AIDS Program/CENSIDA asked the audience to “demand actions, not speeches,” and to push for a MSM plenary and satellite meeting.

#### **REPORT: How to Reduce the Stigma of AIDS: Methods, tools, and measurement (International Center for Research on Women)**

On Saturday, August 12, the International Center for Research on Women hosted a one-day symposium on the intersections of gender, HIV/AIDS stigma, and violence. Dr. Khuat Thu Hong of the Institute for Social

Development Studies (Vietnam) spoke about the media's role in stigma education or perpetuation, and introduced her work on a toolkit designed to sensitize policy makers and media with positive images of PLWHA as productive individuals. Pfiirael Kiwia of Kimara Peer Educators and Health Promoters Trust Fund (Tanzania) emphasized that communities need to understand the implementation of projects in their region in order to provide an ongoing space for reflection and feedback and to motivate role models. Amongst the social struggles of living with HIV/AIDS, such as property grabbing, abandonment, violence, orphanage, "Mama Kiwia" reminded her audience that "stigma is actionable," and we must be "positive about being positive." Speakers questioned the absence of gender equity in the notion of universal access to treatment, the mainstream notion that stigma and discrimination will disappear when "the other stuff" is handled, as well as national policies regarding the entry of PLWHA. Dr. Peter Piot criticized national HIV/AIDS budgets for not reflecting gender issues, as gender discrimination and universal access are major barriers to stopping the spread of HIV/AIDS.

**INTERVIEW: Shivananda Khan, Chief Executive, Naz Foundation International**

OSI: What is your experience with the IAC? Have you attended previous IAC conferences?

SK: Generally, my experiences have been good, as I use the opportunities that such a large gathering generate for primarily networking and sharing of information, making new contacts, and refreshing old ones. Generally, I only participate in the MSM sessions, as this is the field in which I work. Yes, I have attended previous IACs. I was particularly impressed with the Bangkok one, which was very useful.

OSI: Why are you attending this conference? Who are you representing? What are your expectations? What kind of work do you expect to be doing (e.g., networking, lobbying, running or participating in workshops, etc.)?

SK: I am attending this IAC for two particular reasons. The first is because I was invited to be a part of the Steering Committee organizing the pre-conference, *MSM and HIV: Advancing the global agenda for gay men and other men who have sex with men* satellite, and I will be actively participating in that meeting. The second reason is that NFI is co-hosting an Asia Pacific consultation meeting on MSM and HIV in New Delhi India in September with NACO (National AIDS Council, India) under the title of *Risks and Responsibilities: A Male Sexual Health and HIV in Asia and the Pacific an international consultation meeting*, and I wanted to network around this issue. This meeting also ties up with one of the goals of the pre-conference satellite, which is to launch the Global Forum on MSM and HIV. I will be representing Naz Foundation International, and the work that it does providing technical, institutional and financial support to MSM networks, groups and organizations to develop their own sexual health and HIV services in South Asia. NFI and I hope that the links we will establish at the pre-conference meeting will strengthen the work that we do in the South Asia region, as well as promote the *Risks and Responsibilities* consultation meeting as well. I further hope to make strong links with other regional MSM and HIV networks, and ensure that the Asia Pacific MSM and HIV network emerging from *Risks and Responsibilities* will play a strong role in subsequent global forums. Beyond this, I hope to learn more, share more, and make new friends.

I am giving a presentation on MSM and HIV in Asia and the Pacific as well as chairing a workshop session on reducing vulnerability and advancing gay/MSM/transgender rights. I am also presenting at the ICASO session on "laws and policies increasing vulnerability of MSM." I am holding a range of meetings with UNAIDS representatives and others in regard to *Risks and Responsibilities* and the work of NFI. Further to this will be networking and lobbying for increasing investment and scaling up coverage of MSM and sexual health programming in South Asia and elsewhere in Asia and the Pacific, as well as promoting the Global Forum on MSM and HIV.

OSI: Please describe yourself, your work and your organization.

SK: I am founder and Chief Executive of Naz Foundation International which provides technical institutional and financial support to MSM networks, groups and organizations to develop their own sexual health services primarily in South Asia.

**Upcoming Events of Interest:** (please note: we have attempted to highlight a few select event that the editors consider to be addressing emerging issues or innovative practices. The fact that this is a very difficult task is an encouraging sign that sexual health and rights have a distinct place on the agenda of AIDS 2006, even if marginalized groups still remain at the margins. We cover events through Tuesday. Subsequent issues will continue to note events of interest.)

*Women's and Girls' Rally and March*

Monday, August 14, 7:00 AM

Metro Hall Square

*Sexual Rights and HIV/AIDS: Activists working together to impact shifting policies on sexual and reproductive freedom and safety*

Monday, August 14, 12:30 PM-2:00 PM

Global Village- Session Hall 1

*Sex workers are part of the solution*

Monday, August 14, 2:15-3:45 PM

Global Village-Session Hall 1

*Where is the pleasure in safer sex?*

Monday, August 14, 6-8 PM

Skills building room 1

*Sexual and reproductive health and rights of people living with HIV/AIDS*

Tuesday, August 15, 10:45 AM -12:15 PM

Session room 6

*Being Queer in the African/Black Diaspora*

Tuesday, August 15, 12:30-2 PM

Global Village-Session hall 2

*Sex Work, HIV and Politics*

Tuesday, August 15, 2:15 PM-3:45 PM

Global Village, Session Hall 1

*Women, taking charge in the AIDS response (Global Coalition on Women and AIDS)*

Tuesday, August 15, 2:15 PM

Session Room 8

*Strategies to address gender-based violence – discussion and strategy session*

Tuesday, August 15, 4-5:30 PM

Global Village-Women's networking zone

*Criminalization and HIV: stories of communities fighting back*

Tuesday, August 15, 4:15-5:45 PM

Session room 9

*Sex workers performance*

Tuesday, August 15, 5:45-6:15 PM

Global Village Main Stage

*LGBT Prevention Efforts in the Developing World*

Tuesday, August 15, 6:00 PM-8:00 PM

Skills Building room 11

*Women, Girls, HA: Gender and HR Issues*  
Tuesday, August 15, 6:00 PM-8:00 PM  
Skills Building Room 8

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