



MEDIA BRIEF

22nd International AIDS Candlelight Memorial Sunday 15 May 2005

Background

"We must make people everywhere understand that the AIDS crisis is not over; that this is not about a few foreign countries, far away. This is a threat to an entire generation, that it is a threat to an entire civilization..."

- United Nations Secretary, General Kofi Annan

Since 1983, the International AIDS Candlelight Memorial has honoured the memory of those lost to AIDS, shown support for those living with HIV/AIDS, raised awareness of the disease, and mobilised community involvement in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

On Sunday, 15 May 2005, the event will be observed in hundreds of cities around the world. Local observances are coordinated by groups and individuals.

The first International AIDS Candlelight Memorial was held in 1983, when the cause of AIDS was unknown and no more than a few thousand AIDS deaths had been recorded. The organisers wished to honour the memory of those lost to AIDS and to demonstrate support for those living with AIDS. That remains the focus of the event today.

Since 1983, the pandemic has claimed more than 28 million lives, with over 42 million now living with HIV/AIDS.

In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the number of people living with HIV in 2003 stood at 1.2 million. HIV/AIDS numbers are expanding rapidly in the Baltic States, the Russian Federation and several Central Asian republics. In Asia and the Pacific, an estimate of 1 million people acquired HIV in 2002, bringing the total to 7.2 million people who are now living with HIV. The growth of the epidemic in this region is largely due to the growing epidemic in China, where a million people are now living with HIV and where official estimates foresee an increase in that number over the coming decade. Current projections

suggest that an additional 45 million people will become infected with HIV in low and middle income countries between 2002 and 2010 unless a drastically expanded, global prevention effort is mounted.

As AIDS continues to ravage communities around the world, the Candlelight Memorial has become a way for communities to take action by publicly mourning loved ones lost to AIDS, and by strengthening local and national commitments to fighting the pandemic.

The International AIDS Candlelight Memorial is a program of the Global Health Council.

The theme for the 2004-2005 International AIDS Candlelight Memorial is *TURNING REMEMBRANCE INTO ACTION*, provides the opportunity to discuss not only the impact of HIV/AIDS within the community, but also how we can address issues such as prevention, care, treatment, and education.

The International AIDS Candlelight Memorial gives individuals across the globe an opportunity to come together to remember and support those who have been touched by HIV/AIDS. The gathering allows us to share with one another how HIV/AIDS has affected our lives, as well as visualise how the community can play more of a role in prevention, care, treatment and education.

The Memorial around the World

Around the world, local coordinating organisations, which are often community-based AIDS organisations, religious groups or coalitions of people living with HIV/AIDS, have already begun planning Candlelight events in their areas.

Anticipated Candlelight observances include a variety of events, from the lighting of candles and oil lamps in rural villages in Southeast India, to processions in Latin America, to inter-faith memorial services held in towns all over the US, to the Candlelight memorial here in the ACT.

The Candlelight Memorial has four goals:

To honour those who have died of AIDS;

To demonstrate public support for those living with HIV/AIDS;

To raise awareness of opportunities to respond to HIV/AIDS, and

To assist grassroots organizations in building multi-sector community support and commitment to local, national, and/or global efforts to end the AIDS pandemic.

Memorial Events in Canberra

In Canberra the AIDS Action Council of the ACT will be coordinating local activities surrounding the International AIDS Candlelight Memorial on Sunday 15 May.

Ecumenical Memorial Service

All Saints Church in Ainslie from 5.30pm to 6.30pm.

All Saints Church has a long tradition of involvement in HIV/AIDS issues and has, for many years, hosted memorial services for the International AIDS Candlelight Memorial in May and for World AIDS Day on 1 December.

Candlelight Memorial Ceremony

National Museum of Australia from 7.00pm to 8.30pm

There will be a brief formal ceremony in the Studio Theatre in which the ACT Health Minister Simon Corbell will participate. Members, volunteers, clients and supporters of the AIDS Action Council have been invited, along with the Canberra community, other community organisations and representatives of the diplomatic community.

This will be followed by a ceremonial unfolding in the Great Hall of blocks of the Australian AIDS Memorial Quilt, each containing eight panels made by loved ones and friends in memory of a person who has died with HIV/AIDS. During this part of the evening, names of local people lost to HIV/AIDS will be read and acknowledged.

Participants will then be invited to light memorial candles which will be displayed in the grounds of the Museum.

Thanks to the Hyatt Hotel, participants will then be offered a light supper of hot soup and damper.

The AIDS Action Council acknowledges and is grateful for the generous support of the National Museum of Australia for providing the venue for this year's event.



The event at the National Museum of Australia will a major photo opportunity with the unfolding of blocks of the Australian AIDS Memorial Quilt framed by a red ribbon marked with the names of friends and family who have passed, memorial candles will be lit and displayed in the grounds of the museum.

For further information about these events contact:

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HIV/AIDS in Australia: the local context

The 22nd International Candlelight Memorial is being held at a time when Australia's 5th National HIV/AIDS Strategy is due to be introduced. As such the Memorial is a timely reminder that HIV/AIDS remains an important local public health issue at a time of increasing complacency.

Despite the success of the Australian response which has been predicated on the notion of a partnership between governments, the academic and scientific sectors and community organisations, it seems that we are again moving into another difficult stage in the ever changing epidemic.

Care and Support Issues

- Treatments have been effective over the last 5 years, but efficacy is waning:
 - Side effects and toxicities is a major problem
 - Viral resistance to drugs is more widespread than previously thought
 - AIDS cases and deaths are increasing after 5 years of decline especially in NSW, Queensland, Victoria and ACT
 - There are few new drugs in the pipeline
- However, there are more people living now with HIV infection in Australia than ever before.
- Issues for these people may include:
 - Financial hardship and poverty
 - Additional treatments related expenses for example anti depression treatments
 - Uncertainty as a result of living with a life-threatening condition;
 - Dealing with opportunistic infections;
 - Maintaining complex anti-HIV treatments regimes
 - Up to 40 pills a day
 - Side effects, including nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea;
 - Loss of appetite and difficulties maintaining body weight;
 - Lethargy and fatigue;
 - Self confidence and body image due, for example, to unsightly lesions and/or wasting;
 - Maintaining intimate relationships;
 - Emotional issues, including depression and anxiety;
 - Rejection and isolation;
 - Living with uncertainty about the future;
 - Restrictions on travel; if you are HIV + you are not allowed into the USA unless you have a waiver.
 - Staying in the workforce or coping in the workplace;
 - Maintaining confidentiality;
 - Discrimination and stigma

Education and Transmission Prevention Issues

- Cumulative figures to September 2004 claim that in Australia, 23,989 have been diagnosed with HIV, 9,392 people have been diagnosed with AIDS, and there have been 6459 deaths attributed to AIDS.¹
- Approximately 839 new diagnoses are being made each year, (of which an estimated 450 are new infections in people who have previously tested negative)
- The ACT figures on new diagnoses are continuing to increase. In 1 October 02- 30 September 03 the reported cases were (male and female) 5 in 1 Oct 03 – 30 Sept 04 the increase was 7 reported cases. The Cumulative to 30 Sept 04 for ACT was 277.²
- ACT figures on AIDS related deaths are remaining stable. Cumulatively, there have been more than 77 deaths in the ACT attributed to AIDS to 30 Sept 04.³
- In other states of Australia the reported cases of new diagnoses of HIV infection were for NSW 1 October 02- 30 September 03 the reported cases were (male and female) 440 in 1 Oct 03 – 30 Sept 04 the cases were 361. For Victoria 1 October 02- 30 September 03 the reported cases were (male and female) 219 in 1 Oct 03 – 30 Sept 04 the cases were 209.
- New infections remain overwhelmingly among gay men and men who have sex with men standing at 77% of the total number of new diagnoses of HIV.⁴
- Social research is showing a significant increase in unprotected sex
- The challenges for educators is becoming increasingly difficult:
 - 15 years of promoting people to take ‘counter-intuitive’ actions every time they have sex
 - Other important preventative health promotion interventions (e.g. anti-smoking, skin cancer, drink driving) are also complex and take substantial time to achieve behavioural change
 - HIV/AIDS is perhaps even more complex, involving intimate behaviours when people often act impulsively

Illicit Drug Issues

- Current Federal government drugs policy is being used by some sectors to undermine successful harm reduction strategies
- Changes in the nature of drugs being used (less heroin, more cocaine/crystal) have the potential to lead to more erratic behaviour and risk safe sex or safe injecting practices.

¹ National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research Australian HIV Surveillance Report Vol 21 No1 January 2005

² National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research Australian HIV Surveillance Report Vol 21 No1 January 2005 page 10

³ National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research Australian HIV Surveillance Report Vol 21 No1 January 2005 page 5

⁴ National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research Australian HIV Surveillance Report Vol 21 No1 January 2005 page11

***ADULTS AND CHILDREN ESTIMATED TO BE LIVING
WITH HIV/AIDS, WORLDWIDE END 200 439.4 million world wide***

***ESTIMATED NUMBER OF ADULTS AND CHILDREN
NEWLY INFECTED WITH HIV WORLDWIDE DURING 2004 now 4.9 million⁵***

As the world enters the third decade of the AIDS epidemic, the evidence of its impact is undeniable. Wherever the epidemic has spread unchecked, it is robbing countries of the resources and capacities on which human security and development depend. In some regions, HIV/AIDS, in combination with other crises, is driving ever-larger parts of nations towards destitution.

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- United Nations Secretary, General Kofi Annan

Further information about the International AIDS Candlelight Vigil is available on:
www.candlelightmemorial.org

⁵ UNAIDS internet www.unaids.org