

MSC mobilising for action beyond Global AIDS Week of Action

As much as AIDS is a focal issue for millions of men, women and children around the world, it is an issue of major concern to Sri Lankans exposed to rapid societal changes unheard of before. We seek to highlight several issues of stigmatisation prevailing in our society towards HIV positive people, particularly if they are returnee migrant.

We have evidence that some are thrown out of homes. Friends and relatives look upon them despairingly. They are denied of treatment, nutrition, care and counsel. They have no place to meet, rest, pray, or collect their thoughts or plan life ahead. Some have no way to collect the necessary drugs and share comforting views. Most agencies and donors who provide support and care to HIV positive people are also not within their grasp.

Therefore, during the Global AIDS Week of Action, we have drawn attention from authorities that Sri Lanka has not submitted its coasted National AIDS plan for key HIV/AIDS interventions. We sent letters to the Minister of Health and Director WHO expressing our concern regarding the impact of stigmatisation on HIV positive people.

Besides urging the government and WHO, MSC also collaborated with other organisations who share the common mission to provide support to HIV positive people. The Salvation Army is a faith based organisation that works with disadvantaged communities including migrant workers and people living with HIV. Lanka + is another organisation that works with people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA). They have meagre resources to commence or sustain a project for long to have an impact on communities and change their outlook on stigmatising HIV/AIDS victims. Hence, MSC stepped in to support certain projects of these organisations. An in-depth training of field workers of MSC, Lanka+ and Salvation Army is planned in the pipeline.

However there is a need to mobilise for action beyond Global Week of Action; we find the most significant barrier to speed up delivery of AIDS treatment and achieve universal access is the lack of public awareness and institutional support hence we shall extend our anti stigmatisation drive throughout 2007 in identified locations where our partners have useful contacts within PLWH community and we wish to work on GIPA principles of action.

MSC will go round the country with message of anti stigmatisation and we demand for positive people to be appreciated and their human rights not violated. We intend to work with all NGO, INGO and State Agencies willing to work with us. Lanka + and Salvation Army will join us in this effort.

We are glad that several persons have volunteered to support us both individually and at institution level and we are confident that our main regional collaborator in the field, CARAM Asia with their build up with APN+ will pull us out whenever we need technical and other support.

Written by David Soysa, Executive Director of MSC