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# Youth AIDS Action

Latin American and Caribbean Youth HIV/AIDS Quarterly Newsletter

## Youth in Barcelona AIDS2002

Youth participation at the XIV International Conference on AIDS

With 400 youth in attendance and an increase in representation from Latin America, the XIV International Conference on AIDS, held in Barcelona, Spain July 7-12, highlighted the importance of adolescents in the prevention of HIV/AIDS infections. UNAIDS Director Peter Piot emphasized the importance of working *with* youth, and not just *for* them, and speakers such as former U.S. president Bill Clinton, former South African president Nelson Mandela and World Health Organization director Gro Harlem Brundtland also underscored the crucial role young people play in curbing the AIDS epidemic. The Barcelona YouthForce Rally, organized by YouthNet/FHI, Advocates for Youth and partner organizations including the Pan American Health Organization, sponsored several youth satellite sessions outside the main program. The YouthForce represented advocacy at its best, giving youth visibility. Preparations are underway to better integrate youth in the next AIDS Conference program in Bangkok, giving youth a greater chance to interact and set common goals. PAHO's new projects in HIV/AIDS and youth, funded by SIDA and NORAD, are examples of promising interventions with ample youth participation, the progress of which will be shared during AIDS2004.



Peter Piot during the Barcelona YouthForce Rally

## First Person

Barcelona AIDS2002 seen by two youth leaders

Two youth leaders sponsored by PAHO offer a Colombian and Dominican perspective on the recent AIDS2002 conference: Diana Teresita Espinosa, from Colombia, and Diana Mancebo, from Dominican Republic, both agreed that the youth presence at the conference was very small, even though youth are among the most affected by AIDS. Diana Mancebo appreciated the chance to learn about world-wide experiences in youth and AIDS, particularly work being done in schools and universities, which she will now use in youth projects in her home country. Diana Espinosa emphasized how events such as AIDS2002 could strengthen young people's civic responsibility to better themselves and their communities by being informed and taking action. However, both expected a greater chance for youth to express themselves, their experiences and needs during the event, as well as being treated as equals by the adult participants. Despite this marginalization of youth during the meeting, they are both looking forward to applying their new knowledge in promoting healthy lifestyles and preventing HIV/AIDS in their countries.



Diana Teresita Espinosa during the Barcelona YouthForce Rally

## "Staying Alive:" MTV AIDS Forum

Youth from around the world took part in "Staying Alive," an AIDS forum held during the AIDS2002 conference sponsored by music channel MTV, the Kaiser Foundation and YouthNet/Family Health International ([www.staying-alive.org](http://www.staying-alive.org)). Some 30 teenagers questioned a panel of experts that included religious leaders and pharmaceutical representatives, among others. Cecilia Correa, a youth participant from Argentina, asked former U.S. President Bill Clinton his opinion on HIV/AIDS and gender. Clinton responded that AIDS is a good example of how gender discrimination negatively affects women, especially in countries where women don't have the same opportunities as men. He said educating and promoting HIV prevention among women is an important step towards gender equality. *Thanks to Cecilia Correa for her contribution to this article.*

## Links

- [www.fhi.org](http://www.fhi.org) (YouthNet at Family Health International)
- [www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org) (UNICEF "Young People and HIV/AIDS")
- [www.kff.org/aids2002](http://www.kff.org/aids2002) ("The Tip of the Iceberg: The Global Impact of HIV/AIDS on Youth")
- [www.aguabuena.org](http://www.aguabuena.org) (Human Rights Association in Costa Rica)



Youth leaders and representatives for Latin America/Caribbean at AIDS2002: Jessie Schutt-aine, PAHO; Anick Supplice, FOSREF Haiti; Diana Espinosa, Colombia; Matilde Maddaleno, PAHO; Arletty Pinel, YouthNet; Cecilia Correa, FEIM Argentina; Gabriela Cano Azcarraga, Youth Coalition Mexico

## Youth and AIDS: A Challenge

With approximately 11.8 million young people between the ages of 15 and 24 currently living with HIV around the world, the AIDS epidemic is affecting youth disproportionately, particularly in developing countries. According to Dr. Bernhard Schwartlander of WHO, rates are rising in the Caribbean, Central and South America; 31% of youth living with AIDS in Latin America and the Caribbean are women (UNAIDS/UNICEF AIDS Report, 2002). Adolescents and youth are especially vulnerable to becoming infected because many are sexually active, yet lack information on how HIV/AIDS is transmitted and the skills to protect themselves. Despite this, youth with access to sexuality education and services can reverse the trend. For example, sexually active youth in Brazil, Costa Rica, Chile, Cuba and the Dominican Republic are more likely than adults to use condoms (UNAIDS/WHO/PAHO HIV and AIDS in the Americas, 2001). AIDS also affects the family structure of children and youth: there are 330,000 orphans due to AIDS in Latin America and 250,000 in the Caribbean (UNAIDS Report on the Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic, 2002). The stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS also works against treatment; Nelson Mandela stated during the AIDS2002 conference that people in rural areas can only be helped if traditional leaders speak out against shaming people with AIDS, and encourage those affected to report infections and seek medical treatment (*BBC*, 7/12/02). Comprehensive sexuality education will give youth the tools and abilities needed to help curb the epidemic.

## Results from AIDS2002

- Resource mobilization for HIV/AIDS prevention
- An HIV/AIDS vaccine unlikely in the foreseeable future
- Lack of funding and commitment from wealthy nations still an issue

More info at [www.aids2002.org](http://www.aids2002.org)

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