

World AIDS Day Message - Dr Jimmie Rodgers, Director-General

Monday, 01 December 2008

Visionary Leadership – the key to our fight against HIV/AIDS

Today, World AIDS Day, 1 December 2008, marks the 20th Anniversary of World Aids Day. It also marks the fourth year since Pacific leaders approved a regional strategy to combat HIV and AIDS in the Pacific Islands region.

Central to the strategy is a vision of the Pacific ‘where the spread and impact of HIV/AIDS is halted and reversed; where leaders are committed to lead the fight against HIV/AIDS; and where people living with and affected by HIV are respected, cared for and have affordable access to treatment … within the spirit of compassion inherent in Pacific cultural and religious values”.

Four years on, we have seen some improvements. However, stigmatisation and human rights inequalities still remain. In many Pacific Island countries and territories, the slow pace of legislative reform and cultural and religious taboos are barriers that prevent people living with HIV from accessing care.

Visionary leadership holds the key to our fight against HIV. In countries and regions where leaders have become champions and led their governments in combating HIV, there has been real progress.

It’s a disease that affects not only people who have the virus, but their whole family and the social, cultural and religious foundation they normally rely on for help and care. It is crucial that this foundation remains firm and supportive, just as for any other disease. The fight against HIV is everybody’s business and so is caring for people living with HIV.

I call on leaders in all walks of life in the Pacific to be advocates for people living with HIV, and to help put a human face to a disease that has devastated whole regions of the world. The Pacific is perhaps the one region where there is a realistic chance of halting and reversing the spread of HIV, but achieving this needs Pacific leaders to be at the forefront and to ensure the region’s workers get the resources they require.

Declarations and strategies all demonstrate good intentions. But it is the implementation of positive action to back up these statements – measured by the care provided for people living with HIV and reductions in the number of people infected – that will provide living proof of our commitment to achieving the vision articulated in the Pacific strategy approved by our leaders.