



LET'S REALISE THE CONTROL OVER HIV AND KEEP OUR PROMISES

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December 1, is observed globally as World AIDS Day. The day reminds us that HIV infection is still posing a serious threat to the human race and that the society has a lot to do in preventing HIV as well as in taking care of the infected.

The theme focuses on addressing the critical need to protect human rights and improve accessibility for all to the related services. This year the AIDS Day message has been declared jointly by Mr. Ban Qui Moon, Secretary General of the United Nations Organization and the authorities of UNAIDS. It calls for ensuring fundamental rights to the poor and the marginalized, and to create systems, policies, laws, and procedures through which everyone can access the services without fear of stigma and discrimination.

This year the World AIDS Day also acts as a call to countries to remove the punitive laws which discriminate the people living with HIV, women and the marginalized populations, thereby protecting the human rights of those populations. Countries are also urged to realize the many commitments which they have made to protect human rights in the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS.

Laws which impede access to services in the HIV sector still exist in many countries. Also there are some laws and policies which criminalize those sectors of the community who are most vulnerable to HIV infection. Handling male homosexuality as an act of crime, laws dealing the women sex workers as criminals etc. are examples of this, says experts. They continue that, the

laws that perceive drug abusers as convicts, in turn negatively affect the programs in harm reduction and substitution therapies. Experts from this field are of the view that existing laws pertaining to the implications of this sector are hindrances in offering services for HIV control, treatment and care.

Announcing the slogan for the World AIDS Day, UNAIDS has stated that such laws and policies, social stigma and discrimination against the HIV infected shall be appraised as violation of human rights. The declaration further reinstates that efforts will be commenced from this World AIDS Day Observance to demolish these human right violations thus confirming effective responses to AIDS and universal access to treatment, care and social support to all the HIV infected.

UNAIDS envisages an explicit action plan to attain this goal. It is expected to attain the objective of 'reaching the one and all' with HIV related services through specific steps like; reducing sexual transmission of HIV; preventing mothers from dying and babies from becoming infected with HIV; ensuring that people living with HIV receive treatment; preventing people living with HIV from dying of tuberculosis; protecting drug users from becoming infected with HIV; removing punitive laws, policies, practices, stigma and discrimination that block effective responses to AIDS; empowering young people to protect themselves from HIV; stopping violence against women and girls; enhancing social protection for people affected by HIV. UNAIDS is a coalition program of various UN organizations.

The first AIDS Day observance in the world was on 1st December 1988. Since then December 1st is being observed as World AIDS Day every year. Through the past twenty one years' AIDS Day Observance, ripples have been created to a great extent among countries, administrators and public in matters like the challenges raised by HIV/AIDS, the need for awareness creations and the protective steps to be adopted etc.

It is estimated that there are total 33.2 million people infected with HIV in the world. Among them, 2.5 million are children. Worldwide, 7,400 persons newly get infected with HIV in a day. 4 million people avail treatments as of now. Another 9.7 million are yet to receive treatment. Almost half of the newly infected are of the below 25 age group. Most of them die before they reach the age of 35. These statistics specifies the necessity for an intense and constant vigil to be taken against HIV.

But the reduction in numbers of the newly infected indicates the impact of the programs offered in this area. 3 million people newly got infected with HIV worldwide in the year 2001, whereas it has been reduced to 2.7 million in 2007. HIV related death was 2.5 million in 2005 but it has been reduced to 2.2 million in 2007. It is estimated that there are 2.31 million people infected with HIV in India.

In Kerala, as per the Sentinel Surveillance Survey conducted during 2007, the number of people living with HIV is estimated to 55,167. As per the records of the Ushus Centers (ART Centers) functioning under the auspices of Kerala State AIDS Control Society the number of HIV infected people registered for ART treatment till June 2009 are 10,491.

Kerala by the State AIDS Control Society facilitates the observance of the World AIDS Day in all parts of the State and across all sections of the society.