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## YOUTH DECLARATION

*PRESENTATION BY ALISCHA ROSS AND JOVESA SPEITH*

We, the attendees of the Sixth International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (ICAAP) Youth Forum have gathered in Melbourne, Australia, to discuss and affirm our collective responsibilities in mobilising against the spread and impact of HIV/AIDS.

We value this opportunity to ensure that the voices of young people are heard at the Congress and urge the Congress, regional governments, non-government organisations, HIV/AIDS activists and the international community to endorse and act upon the following recommendations:

### **Sexual and reproductive health**

- We affirm the rights of young people to adequate and accessible education, services and support around issues of reproductive and sexual health.
- We recommend that all measures be taken to centrally include to the greatest degree possible, the participation of young people in the design, delivery and evaluation of sexual and reproductive health programs, in view of building these programs as accessible and relevant. We also recommend that young people themselves decide upon the methods, techniques and language of training for young people.
- We recommend that the needs of all young people, especially those from marginalised and vulnerable contexts and backgrounds, be met by sexual and reproductive health services and programs, including where necessary, separate initiatives for these groups as well as on the basis of gender.
- We recognise that there are differing levels of opportunity within and across cultures and that language represents a fundamental barrier to young people's education, involvement and empowerment around HIV/AIDS. We urge that young people be centrally involved in developing language suitable for their own local circumstances that maximises young people's capacity to mobilise around HIV/AIDS issues, regardless of caste, education, literacy or skill level. We assert that the use of language must itself increase access to skills development for *young* people rather than exclude, isolate or perpetuate the disadvantaged status of many young people.

### **Sex education and access to health and support services**

- We recognise that the provision of sophisticated and detailed sex education is paramount if the use of sexual and reproductive health services and programs is to be accessible and relevant.
- Such programs must explicitly contain detailed information about sex, sexuality in all of its diversity, puberty, sexual health, HIV/AIDS, contraception, abortion and family planning. We support appropriate and directed services for young people of diverse sexualities *and environments that support young people's freedom to express, question and explore their sexualities.*
- We affirm the rights of all young people to be properly educated about their reproductive and sexual anatomies and be informed about the risk, symptoms and treatment of sexually transmitted infections.
- We support the provision of explicit and frank education programs in school environments as well as accessible education and information directed at young people not in school environments, especially marginalised young people such as young migrant workers, young refugees, incarcerated youth and untouchable youths. We urge the use of trained peers for these activities.
- We recognise that the HIV/AIDS epidemic both affects and infects children and young people and we urge governments and leaders across the region to recognise and respond to the needs of the increasing numbers of children and young people orphaned and affected by the AIDS-related deaths of family members.
- We stress the importance of having specific counselling dedicated to the needs of young people, both infected and affected.
- We demand that governments also address issues of discrimination, stereotyping, isolation and lack of support experienced by these young people.

### **Gender issues**

- We recognise that young women and girls are disadvantaged by socio-cultural contexts that oppress women and that this disadvantage extends to the degree that young women and girls can control and make decisions relating to their sexual and reproductive health.
- We recommend that determined effort be made to educate men from a young age about sexual and reproductive responsibility and gender equality.

- We recognise that gender inequality, while manifest in sexual relationships, must also be actively combated by governments, policy makers, service providers and especially by the designers and providers of sexual and reproductive health services.
- We reject the use of culture as a justification for gender inequality and urge all political, religious and cultural leaders to challenge any cultural phenomenon that heightens HIV risk for young men and women.

#### **HIV Positive youth**

- We urge all governments and non-governmental organisations to recognise this fact and respond accordingly to the needs of all HIV positive young people.
- We defend the right of all HIV positive children and young people to have adequate access to anti-HIV drugs that have been adequately researched in terms of their affect on children's and young people's bodies. In addition, we recommend that all young people have access to appropriate supports in taking HIV treatment including nutrition, adherence support, HIV health monitoring, effective treatment of opportunistic infections and access to appropriate palliative care.
- We defend the rights of HIV positive young people to live free from stigma and discrimination and urge all governments to set in place provisions to that ensure this outcome.
- We demand that HIV positive young people involved in HIV/AIDS related work be given every support and protection by the organisations they are working for, whether that work is paid or unpaid.
- We also demand recognition and responses to the complex support and care needs of HIV positive young people who have also experienced AIDS-related deaths among their families.
- We value HIV positive young people's access to peer support and urge that peer support groups or services be made widely available to all HIV positive young people.

#### **Drug use**

- We recognise that young people across Asia and the Pacific are increasingly affected by illegal drug use. In particular, we recognise the increasing proliferation of injectable substances in the region as well as the increasing use of injection as a means of taking drugs. We alert governments and non-governmental organisations across the region to the real and urgent threat that HIV/AIDS poses to young people who use drugs.
- We affirm the rights of all young people to access sophisticated and realistic drug education and harm minimization services including non-judgemental and culturally appropriate counselling, sterile procedures, needle and syringe exchange, safe injection spaces, appropriate education in relation to alternative routes of administration, substitution programs and rehabilitation services.
- We recognise the diversity of drugs accessible in different parts of the region and urge considered responses to the impact that drug use can have on young people's sexual responsibility.
- We demand an effective response to drug use that makes international producers and traffickers of drugs the subject of judicial intervention and incarceration and recognises the health needs of small-scale users and addicts as paramount. We recommend that small-scale users and addicts be referred to appropriate drug support and rehabilitation services, rather than criminalised and placed in prisons.
- We urge that a Youth Forum be staged at the Seventh ICAAP in Kobe, Japan in 2003 and that youth facilitators be trained specifically for that event. We also urge that country-based youth conferences be staged across the region in preparation for the Seventh ICAAP Youth Forum.