

DRAFT Proposal for Youth Participation at the 16th International AIDS Conference Global Youth Coalition on HIV/AIDS

The Global Youth Coalition on HIV/AIDS (GYCA) is a UNAIDS supported alliance of close to 600 youth leaders in HIV/AIDS, and is youth-driven and youth-managed. GYCA seeks to partner with major stakeholders including but not limited to Family Health International (FHI), TakingITGlobal (TIG), Advocates for Youth (AFY), Youth Coalition (YC), and Students Against Global AIDS (SAGA), to include youth in the planning process for the conference and to develop a Toronto Youth Force (TYF) including a pre-conference two-day workshop. The TYF will organize hundreds of youth active in the HIV/AIDS international community to effectively participate in the 2006 Toronto International AIDS Conference (IAC).

BACKGROUND

Why is youth participation in IACs important?

Young people below the age of 25 make up more than half of the 14, 000 new infections that occur daily¹. Young people, particularly young women, are most vulnerable to HIV infection because they lack of information, education, and services necessary to protect themselves from infection. In addition, the vast majority of young people living with HIV/AIDS lack access to affordable treatment and care.

The wide range of conditions that increase risk behavior for young people demand action on the part of governments, community leaders, and major stakeholders. Economic destitution and a lack of gainful employment leads to intravenous drug use and sexual exploitation, sociocultural and religious attitudes to sex and sex education make it difficult for young people- especially girls- to access vital information to protect themselves, the lack of affordable treatment and care leads to young AIDS orphans heading up families. IACs enable young people to not only explore these topics, to create strategies for action to ameliorate conditions, and learn from conference sessions, but also to advocate for action on these conditions with regional and international leaders, policy makers and donors.

Young people are uniquely positioned to affect change in the exponential spread of the pandemic. They possess the innovativeness, idealism, dedication, creativity, and enthusiasm to become leaders in the HIV/AIDS movement. In addition, young people are crucial in targeting prevention efforts to those most vulnerable to HIV infection. Young leaders have the potential to enormously influence and enhance current efforts, yet they lack crucial resources and opportunities to effectively participate in those efforts.

IACs create a unique gathering place for all stakeholders to share knowledge, experiences, and skills in order to collectively further the fight against HIV/AIDS. Participation in IACs provides skilled and motivated young people with the ability to network with one another, learn from health experts and new ways of educating themselves and their peers, exhibit their work, bring knowledge and best practices back to their communities, and join networks of HIV/AIDS leaders in their communities, countries, and regions. Youth Participation is essential to ensure that current progress in HIV/AIDS continues to have a long term effect, as youth will spearhead progress made in HIV/AIDS for future generations.

What is meant by 'meaningful youth participation'?

Meaningful youth participation at important events such as the IACs goes beyond increased attendance of young people. Young people have ceased to be mere beneficiaries of HIV/AIDS information and services but are necessary agents of change that must be brought to the table. Mere attendance at important conferences creates tokenism of important stakeholders and also tends to privilege elite young people.

Although young people are more than half of people infected each year by HIV, only 350 out of 19,000 attendees were youth. Increased access to meaningful participation in the IAC ensures that youth are presenters of poster presentations, workshops, and sessions (both educational and plenary). It means that young participants effectively utilize knowledge and skills gained at the IAC in their communities after the conference. It also means that they contribute to the skills, knowledge, and best practices shared by adults at the IAC, and that they successfully create

¹ Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation: <http://www.youthandhiv.org/>

youth-adult partnerships. Meaningful participation creates a mainstreamed, active role for youth rather than one of an on-looker as youth around the world struggle to empower themselves in this movement².

Youth Participation at Previous IACs

GYCA was proposed by youth participants at the 14th International AIDS Conference in Barcelona and was formally initiated at the 15th International AIDS Conference in Bangkok, with support from UNAIDS and UNFPA. Its main objectives are to empower youth with capacity-building resources; provide the ability to network locally, regionally and internationally; facilitate political advocacy initiatives; and prepare for future international HIV/AIDS-related events, particularly IACs.

GYCA, and the work that it has accomplished thus far, is a testament to the power of youth to utilize their experiences gained at IACs to transfer invaluable knowledge and skills into action. Since Bangkok, GYCA conducted a needs assessment e-consultation with IAC participants and other youth leaders in HIV/AIDS to guide the development of the coalition. GYCA has mobilized and empowered youth worldwide, including non-ICT connected youth, to organize advocacy and awareness initiatives. In addition, GYCA continues to build youth-adult partnerships and to contribute youth input into HIV/AIDS as evidenced in our publication on UNGASS targets in 17 countries, currently under development. GYCA is continuously building the capacity of close to 600 youth leaders by sharing training resources, courses, and events. Such preparations are crucial to ensuring that young people's participation in IACs and at other events is meaningful and effective.

Bangkok provided many lessons for IAC organizers regarding youth involvement. The Bangkok YouthForce, organized by FHI and Advocates for Youth, created activities that equipped youth with knowledge and skills that will enable them to contribute to the dialogue and implementation of HIV/AIDS programs. During the 2-day pre-conference, youth not only participated in valuable sessions and workshops on various issues related to HIV/AIDS, but they were also prepared to mobilize several initiatives for the actual conference; These included a media campaign, newsletters, networking sessions, and visibility campaign.³ The Bangkok Youthforce played an instrumental role in GYCA's development and will be a very important component in Toronto.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TORONTO YOUTH FORCE

Preparations for the IAC

One of the drawbacks of the Bangkok Youth Force was that preparations did not begin early enough. GYCA and its partners hope to contribute to preparations from the early stages. Thus we request that youth are represented within the committee co-chairs by adding one young co-chair (below age 24). GYCA and its partners are prepared to nominate a skilled youth with technical expertise and work experience to represent youth interests in the planning phase.

In addition, we have extensive local capacity for logistics and planning, namely the following Canadian organizations who have indicated support: TakingITGlobal, Youth Coalition, and Students Against Global AIDS. In addition, GYCA's North America Regional Focal Point, David Suk, is based in Canada and is available for intensive planning as a Local Youth Organizer in the months leading up to the conference.

Pre-conference Recommendations⁴:

FHI and GYCA will collaborate to fundraise and organize the pre-conference for youth participants at the Toronto IAC. The main objectives of the pre-conference are to inform youth attendees of current developments and work in HIV/AIDS by global technical experts, and to train youth on advocacy that they, in collaboration with the experts, will conduct during the conference to inform adult attendees about the need for meaningful youth participation in all areas of HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment.

² From consultation with GYCA members about what signifies 'meaningful youth participation'

³ Bangkok YouthForce Report

⁴ Collaboratively recommended by past YouthForce organizers from FHI and GYCA

GYCA requests the IAS' assistance with suggesting affordable hotel accommodations for youth during the pre-conference, and a venue for the pre-conference. In addition, we request that if the IAS holds its own scholarship programme for youth attendees that arrangements are made to ensure that those participants arrive in time for the important pre-conference.

For the actual conference, we recommend and will organize toward:

- **A Scholarship Competition for youth:** Assistance/and/or advice should be given to youth on how to obtain funds should they get selected to attend the conference. GYCA and its partners for the TYF will begin fundraising for scholarships based on need **and merit** and will streamline the application process with the assistance of TakingITGlobal, on the website for the TYF:
- **TYF website,** most likely developed by TakingITGlobal, will include instructions for and management of the scholarship competition, resources on writing abstracts and other useful resources to prepare youth for effective participation at the IAC
- The inclusion of youth in **plenary sessions**
- A **space** for youth such as Bangkok's Global Village to convene in the evenings after sessions and a Youth Booth/Youth Lounge, in a central location not far from the events where youth can meet and acquire relevant materials (publications, agendas, etc)
- Spaces for youth for **evening sessions** at the Conference venue
- A **special session on youth with leaders** (policymakers, government representatives, and donors, for example, Challenges in Meeting Youth Needs in the Context of HIV/AIDS in the 21st Century
- Emphasis (either through a session or workshop) on **youth-adult partnerships and how to strengthen them.** What are some positive examples of youth-adult partnerships? How can youth effectively reach and collaborate with policymakers, UN representatives, community leaders
- **IAC Promotion Campaign for Youth:** Toronto IAC organizers could collaborate with GYCA to launch a campaign to promote the IAC more for young people so that more of them will apply and attend, especially in resource-constrained areas and among women/girls. Use of local means to disseminate information and connecting existing NGOs with youth networks. The 'Bring Two to Toronto' during Bangkok is an example of a promotion campaign.⁵
- **Empowering Positive Youth:** A private space for positive youth to convene, special sessions on: skills tailored for positive youth to speak out openly and more effectively in their communities/institutions and ways of acquiring treatment regionally or internationally (what can one do if one does not have access to much needed medicines? What do pharmaceutical companies recommend given the particular vulnerability of youth? What do pharmaceutical companies and governments do about treatment provision for young people? Are there some successful examples of this?)

GYCA and its partners seek input from the IAS before developing a formal proposal for the Toronto Youth Force and before beginning to fundraise. We are currently meeting with relevant stakeholders to discern the capacity, needs, and possible contributions of each unique organization to the TYF. We hope to facilitate a constructive dialogue with the IAS during these initial preparatory stages to ensure that meaningful youth participation is prioritized at the upcoming IAC.

⁵ Organizations sending representatives were encouraged to send one youth as well as one adult
www.youthaidscoalition.org