UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICIALS EMPHAZISE HIV/AIDS CRISIS: A WORSENING HUMAN RIGHTS EMERGENCY

29.11.2003

Joint statement by Bertrand Ramcharan, Acting High Commissioner for Human Rights and Paul Hunt, Special Rapporteur on the right to health, on World AIDS Day 2003

HIV/AIDS is a worsening human rights emergency. Its effects are pernicious. It thrives in conditions where people are marginalized. It leads to their further stigmatization. It creates new generations of vulnerable. Women, in particular, bear the brunt of the illness. None of this need be so.

It is impossible to live a dignified life where human rights are denied. By allowing HIV/AIDS to spread - and by failing to treat those affected - we are denying the human rights to life and to health for millions.

All governments have a responsibility to lead an open and inclusive discussion on human rights and HIV/AIDS. Freedoms of expression and of association are fundamental in the struggle against HIV/AIDS. The inability to talk openly about HIV/AIDS has fuelled the stigma linked to this disease. This stigma entrenches discrimination. This can and must be addressed by encouraging discussion about the disease in every quarter.

Honestly addressing HIV/AIDS can only be achieved if the right to information is realized; with out it efforts to deal with HIV/AIDS would grind to a halt. HIV/AIDS-related information must be available in schools, workplaces, governments, religious institutions and throughout all communities. This is vital to combating the mythology associated with this disease. The participation of people living with HIV and AIDS in the design and delivery of these programmes is essential.

Access to affordable medicines is indispensable to the right to health for people in developing and developed countries. The launch of the "3 by 5" initiative by the World Health Organization, UNAIDS and other partners to bring antiretroviral drugs to three million people by 2005 is the beginning of a critical effort that must not end until all who need treatment receive treatment. Equally important have been the efforts within the World Trade Organization to allow the production of low cost drugs and their export to developing countries. These initiatives demonstrate that it is possible to meet the challenge. The initiatives must be multiplied and must be sustained.

The situation remains one of crisis - a crisis which can only be overcome when human rights for all are fully respected.