

MEDIA RELEASE



Scotland cricketers McCallum, Poonia and Sheikh champion children's rights in the fight against HIV and AIDS

Durban 17 September 2007 - Scotland may have made an early exit out of the ICC World Twenty20 2007. However, their support for the ICC, UNICEF and UNAIDS "Unite for children, Unite Against AIDS" global campaign makes them heroes in the eyes of millions of South African children.

Neil McCallum, Navdeep Poonia and Qasim Sheikh put behind the results of their team to give a coaching clinic to scores of children at Siphosetu Primary School, KwaMashu, Durban.

The coaching clinic was organised courtesy of the ICC, UNICEF and UNAIDS partnership that uses the power of world class cricket to raise awareness of the needs and rights of children in the fight against HIV and AIDS. The Scotland cricketers join an array of other international cricket players who have helped to boost the campaign.

Recognising the difficult circumstances the majority of South African children have to endure to attain better education and health, McCallum said: "We tend to take for granted the kind of things other children enjoy. My coming here opens my eyes to a new world, and I'm only too happy to give these children the encouragement they need.

"The most important thing is for the children to be given a little push, especially in ensuring that they have a health state of mind and body. Cricket as a sport can help them attain these qualities and much more."

McCallum's words found fertile ground in the UNICEF South Africa and the Department of Education (DoE)'s Sports for Development Programme. The programme, under the auspices of UNICEF's Children Friendly Schools encourages physical sports activities in the learning curriculum for school children. The Child Friendly schools are also gender sensitive, stress equality, support and child protection. Furthermore, they form meaningful partnerships with the surrounding communities. UNICEF identified Siphosetu School as one of the schools that meets its criteria for Child Friendly Schools.

DoE Deputy Director; Pinetown District, Sam Masuku said: "With the kind of attention the Scotland cricket players have brought on the subject of having children of health mind and body, the results in the classroom and beyond can only be in the interest of children, and the nation at large. Furthermore, this coaching clinic by the international cricketers helps to destigmatise the HIV and AIDS, and contributes in a big way for children to be aware of a HIV and AIDS.

"In the long term South Africa would not be in a dire need for talent on the cricket fields, and other sports. Even in other sectors of the economy."

UNICEF South Africa sees the coaching clinics as a way of highlighting the issues of HIV and AIDS among children to bigger audiences. The backdrop to the "Unite for children, Unite Against AIDS" global campaign are the staggering figures of more than 1000 children under 15 dying from AIDS-related diseases every 24 hours. So, far more than 15 million children have lost one or both parents to AIDS.

With the highest number of HIV people in the world, South Africa has made important strides in the provision of treatment in the recent past and has now the fastest growing uptake and largest number of people on ARV treatment in the world. Yet, AIDS remains the leading cause of death in women and children in the country. UNICEF says improvements in child health and survival will be dependent on the acceleration of access to HIV prevention and treatment for both mothers and children.

Despite this alarming situation, the world still thinks of AIDS as a disease that primarily affects adults. Children are missing from the minds of global policymakers, national governments, pharmaceutical companies, academic institutions and public groups responding to the AIDS pandemic

Poonia and Qasim were impressed with the energy and commitment shown by the children. They noted that the enthusiasm shown by the children was the first step that made it possible for them to reach the international cricket stage.

"If I didn't have fun playing cricket in the school yard, I wouldn't be here in South Africa playing in the ICC Twenty20. I want to say to these children have fun and the skill will kick in. As you can see they are having incredible fun. This helps them to pick up the core values of sport, and hopefully, help them keep out of harms way from HIV and AIDS, and other vices," Qasim said.

School Principal Themba Sokhabse made sure that the Scottish visitors will for sometime relish the Zulu tradition welcome given to them. The welcome menu included young Zulu dancers and the school gospel choir, Scathamiye Boys.

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