

PRESS RELEASE

UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador Angelique Kidjo sends a special message to girls on World Aids Day

1 December, Johannesburg... Fresh from a whirlwind concert performance in Witbank, UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador Angelique Kidjo joined UNICEF South Africa to help raise awareness about children and HIV and AIDS on World Aids Day.

South Africa, with 5.7 million people infected, has the highest number of infected people in the world. On World Aids Day UNICEF joined with partners in the National Department of Health and other United Nations agencies in promoting early testing and treatment for newborns and comprehensive information, education and access to sexual and reproductive health services for young people to protect their right to health.

According to UNICEF, preventing HIV infection in women is the first line of defense in preventing HIV in newborns. Involving young people in HIV efforts is the best way to ensure that programmes are well-targeted and effective.

In a full day's media programme, Ms. Kidjo who believes that educating girls is the most cost-effective way of to help African nations improve quality of life for their citizens, had specific messages for girls. She warned about the dangers of engaging in transactional sex and reminded young people to choose partners carefully and avoid unprotected sex. "Would you rather be rich and dead, or poor and alive?" she asked.

"Some men act as if it is their prerogative to be with young girls and take advantage; I tell girls, you must use the power of 'No'" said Ms. Kidjo.

Ms Kidjo further demonstrated her commitment to helping to lower the incidence of HIV and AIDS among young people, by encouraging voluntary counseling and testing for all. She emphasised that protecting oneself from exposure to HIV and AIDS is of primary importance, adding that with knowledge gained from education, girls can make informed choices about their lives and avoid risky sexual behaviour.

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In a television show dedicated to the Prevention of Mother-to-child Transmission (PMTCT), in which an HIV positive mother with three uninfected children also appeared, Ms. Kidjo urged viewers to stop stigmatizing those who have HIV and AIDS and begin openly talking with adolescents and young people about responsible sexual behaviour and protection.

The singing sensation and the panel of South African HIV experts discussed some of the achievements and challenges in PMTCT and wider concerns with respect to HIV and AIDS in South Africa.

Experts on the programme, including Dr Ngashi Ngongo, Chief of Child Survival and Development, UNICEF South Africa, shared knowledge with call-in viewers about the transmission of the HI virus from mother to child and safe infant feeding. They also discussed the effects of stigma and discrimination on HIV infected people.

World Aids Day provides the opportunity to show support for those suffering with HIV and AIDS, dispel myths and empower people with the information to make the right choices in their lives, whether they are HIV positive or negative. For testing or information about treatment please contact your nearest clinic or hospital.

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Note to Editors: Please see: "Children and Aids: the III Stocktaking Report". For more information about UNICEF South Africa please visit www.unicef.org/southafrica.