

## WAGGGS POSITION STATEMENT

### Fighting HIV and AIDS

**The World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) believes that young people need to be put at the centre of the efforts to combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic. As the voice of girls and young women WAGGGS has identified the fight against HIV and AIDS as a priority issue on which to take a stand and speak out.**

WAGGGS provides millions of girls and young women with non-formal education, giving them the opportunity to develop self-esteem, confidence and life skills. Working with Member Organizations in 144 countries, our vision is to build a better world through advocacy and action. We aim not only to speak out on behalf of girls and young women everywhere, but also to empower young women to speak out for themselves.

#### HIV and AIDS Globally

- More than 60 million people have been infected with HIV, and AIDS has already killed more than 20 million people. Half of new HIV infections are among young people aged 15-24, many of whom have no information or prevention services and are still ignorant about the epidemic and how to protect themselves.<sup>i</sup>
- Today, 12 million young people are living with HIV and AIDS and 6,000 more are infected daily. Every hour, 250 young people are infected – one every 15 seconds.<sup>ii</sup> Of the estimated 2.3 million of children under 15 living with HIV, two million live in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Gender inequality and the low status of women remain two of the principal drivers of HIV and AIDS. There is a disproportionate impact of the AIDS epidemic on women and young girls, especially in sub-Saharan Africa where, on average, three women are HIV-infected for every two men. Among young people (15–24 years), that ratio widens to three young women for every young man.<sup>iii</sup>
- Inadequate knowledge about HIV and AIDS, a lack of education and life skills put young people at great risk.<sup>iv</sup> Surveys in 18 countries indicate that less than 50 per cent of young people have a comprehensive knowledge about HIV.<sup>v</sup> Some 80 percent of people above the age of 15, even in high-prevalence settings, are still not getting access to prevention services.
- However, in the past decade there have been some positive trends in young people's sexual behaviours in many countries with generalized epidemics - changes that include increased use of condoms, delay of sexual debut and fewer sexual partners. Declines in HIV prevalence among young people between 2000 and 2005 are evident, for example, in Botswana, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania and Zimbabwe.<sup>vi</sup>
- Girls and young women have less access to education and HIV information, tend not to enjoy equality in marriage and sexual relations, and remain the primary caretakers of family and community members suffering from AIDS-related illnesses.<sup>vii</sup>

i UNFPA, State of the World Population report, 2002

ii UNAIDS and the World Assembly of Youth Statement on World AIDS Day December 2006

iii UNAIDS/WHO AIDS Epidemic Update 2006

iv WHO 2006, Preventing HIV/AIDS in young people

v Various Demographic and Health Surveys (2000-2005) quoted in "The global Coalition on Women and AIDS 2006. Keeping the Promise: An Agenda for Action on Women and AIDS"

vi UNAIDS/WHO AIDS Epidemic Update 2006

vii The Global Coalition on Women and AIDS 2006. Keeping the Promise: An Agenda for Action on Women and AIDS

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- Girls' education ranks among the most powerful tools for reducing vulnerability to HIV and AIDS. It can help slow and reduce the spread of HIV and AIDS by contributing to female economic independence, delayed marriage and family planning, as well as greater information about the disease and how to prevent it for themselves and their families.
- Victims of sex trafficking are at great risk of HIV infection. Girls and young women bought and sold into the sex industry face violence and disease on a daily basis, including HIV and AIDS.
- HIV positive girls and young women often have reduced access to necessary treatments and therapies such as antiretrovirals due to their lower economic and social status and cultural position.
- Of the 2.9 million people who died of AIDS during 2006, more than one in ten were children aged 15 years or under.<sup>viii</sup> Despite these alarming figures, currently an estimated 90 percent of children who could benefit from treatment are not receiving it.<sup>ix</sup> Evidence shows that in the absence of treatment, up to 50 per cent of HIV-positive children die by their second birthday.<sup>x</sup> Reasons include few appropriate drugs, high drug prices and the lack of healthcare workers trained to treat children.
- 15.2 million children under the age of 18 have lost one or both parents to AIDS. More than 12 million of these are in sub-Saharan Africa. By 2010, the number of orphans due to AIDS in the continent is expected to rise to more than 16 million. Less than 10 percent of children who have been orphaned or made vulnerable by AIDS receive support or services from outside of their communities.
- Stigma and discrimination persists in many countries where HIV and AIDS is still a taboo. Fear and ignorance are great obstacles to comprehensive and supported HIV and AIDS education.

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viii UNAIDS/WHO AIDS Epidemic Update 2006

ix UNAIDS/WHO (2006, June), Progress in Scaling Up Access to HIV Treatment in Low and Middle-Income Countries

x UNICEF 2006

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**WAGGGS calls on the international community and national governments to actively increase their efforts to fight HIV and AIDS among young people by:**

- **Ensuring** young people have access to comprehensive, objective, non-biased, gender and youth-specific information on HIV and AIDS
- **Increasing access** for young people to effective methods for protection (such as condoms) and supporting organizations involved in promoting HIV and AIDS education for girls and young women
- **Helping empower** girls and young women with increased efforts to eliminate gender inequality as a necessary starting point towards a secure environment for young women to take responsible decisions on their reproductive health. This includes working towards the elimination of violence against young women
- **Involving** young people in the fight against HIV and AIDS as key partners and including them in the planning, delivering and evaluation of HIV and AIDS initiatives
- **Enabling** girls and young women to have equal access to treatment programmes and therapies, including antiretroviral medication

**WAGGGS urges Member Organizations to:**

- **Integrate** HIV/AIDS education into their regular programme of activities
- **Advocate** for non-discriminatory access to HIV and AIDS education and treatment and for clear, objective, non-biased, gender and youth-specific information in formal and non-formal education
- **Lobby** for the empowerment and self-determination of young women, and emphasize the important role of non-formal education in the empowerment of girls
- **Support** efforts to remove barriers for young women to be able to take decisions regarding their reproductive health
- **Build** confidence in girls and young women and help break down gender stereotypes to overcome these barriers
- **Run** training programmes to provide girls and young women with life skills and to empower them economically
- **Involve** young people in the fight against AIDS including supporting girls and young women to speak out and develop their own actions to fight HIV and AIDS

**How WAGGGS is addressing the fight against AIDS:**

- The majority of WAGGGS' 144 Member Organizations are running projects on HIV and AIDS in their own countries.
- WAGGGS believes that education and empowerment of young people in a formal and non-formal setting is a key approach to fight HIV and AIDS, with special attention paid to the needs of girls and young women, and seeks to integrate it into the activities of all Member Organizations.
- Girl Guides and Girl Scouts can earn the AIDS Badge by undertaking activities in three areas of the badge's curriculum: fighting fear, shame and injustice; prevention through change in behaviour; and care and support for people living with HIV and AIDS.
- WAGGGS has a strong partnership with UNAIDS and is working on a groundbreaking project to tackle HIV and AIDS worldwide. The project will develop a new HIV prevention training module aimed at raising levels of knowledge about HIV prevention as well as increasing WAGGGS' capacity to train girls and young women as peer educators on HIV prevention and stigma reduction.
- WAGGGS published 'HIV and AIDS Fighting Ignorance and Fear' which showcases best practice examples of HIV and AIDS projects of Member Organizations in the areas of education, awareness raising and care and support.

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#### CASE STUDIES

##### WAGGGS AIDS badge

Girl Guides and Girl Scouts of all ages are able to earn the WAGGGS AIDS Badge, a project developed in partnership with ICASO (International Council of AIDS Service Organizations) and UNAIDS. The curriculum is formed of diverse activities that address key issues on HIV and AIDS awareness including:

- **Prevention** through change in behaviour - where Girl Guides and Girl Scouts demonstrate that they understand some of the ways in which HIV is transmitted and that they have disseminated that information successfully to their peers.
- **Eliminating discrimination** - Girl Guides and Girl Scouts successfully complete a task that educates others as well as themselves about the facts on HIV and AIDS, with the aim of eliminating discrimination.
- **Care and Support** - Girl Guides and Girl Scouts learn how to care for and support members of their community who are living with HIV and AIDS. This includes caring for, and supporting, Girl Guides and Girl Scouts who are living with HIV and AIDS.

##### *Listen, Learn, Live* - HIV project in Brazil

The Federação de Bandeirantes do Brasil has been running a project *Listen, Learn, Live* since 2000 to promote awareness of HIV and AIDS issues among adolescents and young adults. It is being supported by UN agencies and the Brazilian Ministry of Health.

To date, the project has reached more than 50,000 young people between ages 12 and 21 through several events, and an internet site which answers queries related to HIV and AIDS. The Association's "AIDS Prevention Distance Learning Internet Course" won an 'Honorary Mention' at the 6th Sao Paulo Virology Congress.

##### HIV, Sexual and Reproductive Health in Malawi

The Malawi Girl Guides Association runs an HIV and AIDS Awareness Project in three districts of the country aimed at training to raise awareness about, and provide information on, issues of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) relating to HIV and AIDS. This project started in 2002, and to date the Association has trained 45 regional trainers, 30 Guiders and 60 Cadets (Peer Educators) in SRH issues and rights, and psychosocial support life skills for orphans and other vulnerable children. More than 5,400 girls and young women have been reached with SRH information and services, and almost 1,000 orphans and other vulnerable children have been reached with psychosocial life skills.

The Association has also documented best practices in SRH/HIV/AIDS which have been printed and distributed to members and other partners. Information and education materials have also been developed and SRH/HIV/AIDS messages have been incorporated into the Association's already existing Girl Guide Laws to make them relevant to Girl Guiding programmes.

**"The ultimate criterion to judge all AIDS programmes is "Does this work for women and girls?"**

*Dr Peter Piot, Executive Director, UNAIDS (June 2006)*

**"Twenty five years into the epidemic, considerable progress has been made in mobilizing the world against AIDS....But when it comes to accessing HIV prevention and treatment services, children and young people continue to be left behind. If we are to break the cycle of HIV infection, children and young people must know how to protect themselves from HIV."**

*Dr Peter Piot, Executive Director, UNAIDS (February 2006)*