



World Chronicle

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HIV/AIDS AND THE MEDIA

The Global Media AIDS Initiative is a recent effort to involve media organizations from around the world in helping to achieve one of the UN's main goals: to halt – and hopefully reverse – the spread of HIV/AIDS worldwide by the year 2015. How effective can the media be in keeping an estimated 45 million people from getting infected with HIV/AIDS in the next decade? How will the support of computer billionaire and philanthropist Bill Gates, and of the Kaiser Family Foundation, translate into measurable progress in halting the pandemic? Is the media suffering from 'fatigue' in covering the global HIV/AIDS story? These are some of the questions examined in this edition of World Chronicle with the help of Dr. Peter Piot, the Executive Director of UNAIDS.

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ANNOUNCER: From the United Nations in New York, an unedited interview programme on global issues. This is **World Chronicle**. And here is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

WILLIAMS: Hello, I'm Mary Alice Williams and this is **World Chronicle**.

Can the world's media organizations help reverse the HIV/AIDS pandemic and keep tens of millions of people from becoming infected with the virus? That's what UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Bill Gates and the Kaiser Family Foundation hope can be achieved with the recent launch of the Global Media AIDS Initiative. With us today to discuss how the media can help save lives and halt the spread of AIDS is Dr. Peter Piot, the Executive Director of UNAIDS.

WILLIAMS: Thank you very much for being with us, Doctor. You've been quoted as saying that HIV/AIDS is the epidemic of the information age, what did you mean by that?

PIOT: Well, what I meant by that is that not only that AIDS has become the greatest epidemic of all times -- and it's only 20 years old, we're only at the beginning of it -- but also that it has spread like wildfire in an age of globalization. Just imagine that in 20 years time about 70 million people have become infected with the same virus. They're all connected with each other and that sounds like what we know how information is spreading. But in this case it's through sex, it's through sharing needles, it's because your mother had it and you got a blood transfusion.

WILLIAMS: And spreading because of lack of education as well?

PIOT: Spreading because of lack of education, ignorance, denial, the stigma, the discrimination. And this is where the tools of the information age can really save lives: information.

WILLIAMS: Joining us here in the studio are Adam Brookes of the *BBC*, and Louis Hamann of the *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation*. Louis?

HAMANN: Dr. Piot, a lot of people I think are going to be wondering why launch this initiative now? AIDS has been around for a long time, the UN itself launched its global fight against AIDS a few years ago now, so why call on the media now to get involved?

PIOT: There are several countries where the media has been very active in the fight against AIDS, and also globally. I think a real pioneer here was MTV reaching up to one billion young people, for example on World AIDS Day last year, with its "Staying Alive" campaign. The BBC has been very active and then there have been soap operas from Brazil to India, to now China, and South Africa that incorporated AIDS as one of the themes of daily life. But what we felt was that it was not enough. HIV continues to spread. Last year more people became infected than ever before, more people died, and we really have to accelerate prevention efforts in addition to making sure people become treated. And just think of China: 80 percent of Chinese don't even know what AIDS is; don't know how to protect themselves.

And I know that information is not enough but it's a start, so there is a need to do more and to do it in a concerted manner.

HAMANN: And specifically speaking, what do you want media to do because there is already quite a bit of coverage on the problem of AIDS? So what specifically do you want me to, or do you expect me to do in this case?

PIOT: Well, actually, there is not that much going on in most countries in terms of media coverage on AIDS. That's certainly the case in Western countries where the perception is that the AIDS epidemic is fixed, now that treatment is there it's finished, and it's only starting in the big countries of Asia, in Eastern Europe where HIV is starting to spread. So what we want the media to do is one, report on AIDS, that it exists. The news, that's one. Secondly, make it part of core programming. In other words, if there's a soap opera make sure that the theme of AIDS is woven into that because it's part of our life today. We also would like to make sure that there is advertisement time for AIDS education programmes, clips, and so on. Knowing that that's not enough but that's really essential. And also we would like the big media to make their products on AIDS freely available to smaller radio stations, smaller TV stations, who may not have the means to produce them.

BROOKES: Just to go back to China for a second – I mean a very good example of what you're talking about where so few people know even the basic facts about AIDS. But does that also illustrate something of a glaring shortcoming in this plan inasmuch as the Chinese media don't decide what they broadcast? Their agenda is not theirs to set, it's decided by the propaganda department of the Chinese Communist Party. So, persuading the Chinese TV that broadcasting about AIDS is a good idea but how far do you really expect to get?

PIOT: Well, in the specific case of China there has been a sea change in the attitude of the highest authorities in the country vis-à-vis the AIDS epidemic. And last year actually, starting I would say September to December, there have been many symbolic acts. There's a commitment, the five commitments by the government to deal with AIDS. It's a totally new game – and the fact that the president of CCTV was here is something that doesn't happen by accident – and there is a clear commitment to report on AIDS. There has been a show called "The Floating Red Ribbon", which was already aired for the first time in 2001, and I think we are off to a very good start.

BROOKES: So, would you expect, for example, coverage of the blood selling scandals in Hunan and elsewhere to become part of that discussion? I mean if it doesn't, really what are you achieving?

PIOT: No, I think it must be. I mean all aspects of the AIDS epidemic in China have to be tackled in the open and the reason I think that that will be the case is that the government has allocated funds to establish treatment centres in Hunan province, and the provinces around that, where most people became infected because of the illegal blood trade where poor farmers sold their blood for survival and then became infected with HIV. So this year will be the test whether the new political direction will be implemented because that's of course a challenge.

BROOKE: But I guess there's a slightly broader point here, which is just that in countries where the media is free to talk about AIDS and where listeners are free to listen and react and make personal choices about how they behave, aren't we talking about it already and the discussions are already out there? In the countries where the media is not free to talk about AIDS – Burma, China, perhaps some Middle eastern countries – really a campaign like this doesn't seem to push us across this particular Rubicon.

PIOT: Well, I think we've got several problems in countries where the media are totally privatized and where, you know, the market incentive for talking about AIDS may not be there. So that requires a special effort – and that's what, for example, Viacom has done whether it's with CBS and with MTV – than in countries or situations where the media controlled by the government, by the state. There, it's very important that the signal comes from the state that this is possible; create a space. So I think this media initiative means that it is a way of, how to say, of creating an incentive, that we have a global movement, and not just leave it to the market forces or the individual decision-making of a propaganda ministry.

WILLIAMS: You've said that this pandemic should be viewed not only in terms of public health policy but economic development, can you elaborate on that?

PIOT: AIDS is an epidemic that has enormous impacts in terms of economics. It's unique in history. It's unlike any other illness because it affects people in the most productive years of their lives and there are a lot of consequences. One is that it affects economic productivity. It kills people whether they have a Ph.D. and are an economist or a teacher, or a farmer, and that has major implications. When you think of South Africa, for example, it was the big companies – like an Anglo-American – who started offering treatment to their employees infected with HIV. And why did they do that? Because it was necessary for

their bottom line, because they were really suffering from people who were ill, who died, and that's very expensive for any company. And the same thing is true when you think of education. One million kids in Africa lost their teacher because he died of AIDS, or she died of AIDS last year. And we know that education is the basis for development, is the basis for many things, so that AIDS really undermines many things. And then we've got all the orphans, those who are left behind; 14 millions orphans already in Africa today.

WILLIAMS: Have any concrete commitments come out of the launch? Is there now more money from the Gates Foundation, or the Kaiser Family Foundation, more beyond those two that are culture-neutral if you will?

PIOT: Well, we have in the first place the commitments of the media companies that were present. Figures that were given was that, for example, Viacom has invested already 200 million dollars in terms of free time, of production investments in this campaign. I know that MTV is doing it, CCTV announced a major effort. We had media companies from Russia and so on so they are investing. Now, other money: UNAIDS is putting money in there, we're doing it together with the Gates Foundation, with Kaiser and we are working now out a plan. We didn't know whether this commitment would work or not.

WILLIAMS: This is **World Chronicle**. We're talking with Dr. Piot of UNAIDS about how the media can help promote AIDS awareness on a global level. Let's take a look now at this spot:

VIDEO ROLL IN (UNAIDS SPOT)

MAN:..... "Don't do this to us"

WOMAN: "I'm sorry. We can't come."

VOICES SPEAKING IN LOCAL LANGUAGES

WOMAN: "With your lifestyle, this was bound to happen."

VOICES SPEAKING IN LOCAL LANGUAGES

MAN: "I knew I couldn't trust you."

VOICES SPEAKING IN LOCAL LANGUAGES

MAN: "Don't follow me."

MAN: "Hey."

VOICES SPEAKING IN LOCAL LANGUAGES

WOMAN: "You bastard!"

WOMAN: "Well, that's your problem, isn't it?"

MUSIC

WILLIAMS: What we've just seen speaks to the stigma and the discrimination suffered by people who are living with HIV.

PIOT: This is really one of the major reasons we have such an AIDS epidemic. That is, that having AIDS is associated with discrimination, with stigma, with bad behaviour in the eyes of many and that means that people who have it why would they come out as having HIV? That means that AIDS remains invisible in many countries and it's a handicap for leaders to be associated with it. It's one of the biggest obstacles to prevention efforts and to making sure that people have access to treatment.

HAMANN: Dr. Piot, I'd like to get back to the campaign itself, the initiative. It seems to be very much predicated on the notion that young people in particular are very receptive to messages they get from television or radio, mass communications tools. Is that a universal phenomenon or is that only true for us in the Western world where television is so much part of daily life? In other words, is that also true in African countries, in African cultures, or elsewhere in the world?

PIOT: In today's world the power of the image and of the world – because it's not only TV but also radio that came up out of the summit; several said in Africa, in many Asian countries, radio is still the number one source of information – but it really forms norms, social norms, and particularly when it's associated with very popular either sports figures, pop music. In most countries in the world young people what do they like to hear, what are their heroes, their role models? It's sports figures and it's singers, it's music and that is very powerful. If we can have them spread the message, that works much better than a million billboards saying, "AIDS kills".

WILLIAMS: You're asking various media companies, like Viacom who's done a programme about AIDS and fighting AIDS and about AIDS awareness, to give their programming rights-free to all media?

PIOT: Right.

WILLIAMS: That's a pretty radical suggestion.

PIOT: It may be radical but it is already happening. For example, MTV's "Staying Alive" programme for the last two years has been made available to any public or private TV station anywhere in the world that is willing to take this, with no restriction.

WILLIAMS: With the global studies done in over 40 countries that indicate 50% of young people aged 18 to 24 have either never heard of the disease or have no idea how it's

transmitted, clearly education is important. What about treatment? What about getting these wildly expensive drugs to the people who need them?

PIOT: Well, before we can start talking about treatment people need to know that they're HIV-positive, that they're infected. In other words, we're faced again with knowledge about the disease, making sure people have access to testing and counselling, that they know where to go, and that's not easy in developing countries, poor countries. And, thirdly, of course, that the medicines, the treatments are affordable. So these are all areas that we work on with UNAIDS and, again, it's all areas where information is an essential component. And so when we think of a treatment and prolonging the life of those who are infected – after all, 40 million people in the world today and of those about half-a-million have access to treatment – we need to make sure that people know about the disease and how to be tested.

HAMANN: Dr. Piot, anybody in the media will tell you that a very important thing in any media campaign is how to measure its success. How do you plan to do that in this case?

PIOT: We have already worked with MTV to evaluate the impact of the “Staying Alive” campaigns in various cultures because that's one of the questions we're having: “How global is the culture today?” And I think that it's probably a combination of two. There is some kind of emerging universal youth culture and on the other hand there is the local culture that is still there. And so what we're doing is we're asking for self-reported behaviours and knowledge but then also trying to see does that really have an impact on using services? For example, will young people call hotlines? Will they go and seek testing and so on? But that's in the beginning and that's one of the jobs that UNAIDS is going to do is evaluating. We are not specialists and the message isn't sound. That's what we have the professionals in the media for. But evaluating, that's one of the things we do.

BROOKES: Which parts of the world are you most worried about now?

PIOT: Well, I have multiple worries. On the one hand, for Africa, my big worry is a double one. One is, how to treat people with HIV in Africa because that's about survival not only of individuals but of nations and economies. And, secondly, how to make sure that the young generation in Africa can remain HIV-free because every single day children are born and all the children become sexually active – which is perfectly normal – and making sure that they remain HIV-negative. But then I'm very worried about Asia and Eastern Europe. This is where we have a new silent epidemic, where we have still a lot of denial, where prevention efforts – because it's in the first place prevention – are still extremely limited and where the stigma and

discrimination associated with HIV is very high. So it's China, it's Indonesia, it's India, it's Russia to just name some of the biggest countries in the world.

BROOKES: Do you ever see any correlation for example between the places that you're worried about and sort of very closed media systems, places where there's a discernible lack of free media? Is that something that's come into play?

PIOT: Well, there's no way clearly that one can deal with something as an AIDS epidemic without openness about a few things, about sex, about drugs and about AIDS itself. And that's not easy in any society but without that open debate there's no way. And that's why it's so important that there is free media, there is the possibility of free discussion, and that there are no sanctions when one puts on the table the difficult issues. And that's not done after midnight but on prime time.

WILLIAMS: Is there an almost North/South divide on the AIDS issue? Half the world trying to help people learn to live with HIV, preferably without stigma, and the other half of the world just trying to keep people from dying?

PIOT: AIDS is a global issue. There's not a single country that hasn't reported HIV, except North Korea, so that's one thing. It's everywhere but it's clear that 90 percent of the burden of the AIDS epidemic is in the poor nations of this world. And that's not by coincidence. Poverty is one of the driving forces because it is linked with illiteracy, the fact that people have no access to information, the governments have no money to provide means for treatment and for prevention campaigns. So the only way that this will be brought under control is really when the wealthier nations will contribute to the fight against AIDS also in the poor nations. And that's not only to do good and a matter of solidarity but let's not forget that AIDS is going to lead to instability, major instability, in the countries that are heavily affected and that will then affect the global economy and the whole world. So it's in our interest in the West to invest in that.

WILLIAMS: This is **World Chronicle**. Our guest is Dr. Peter Piot, Executive Director of UNAIDS. And we're talking about how the media can help to halt the spread of AIDS. Here's a report on what's happening on the radio in Vietnam:

ROLL IN VIDEO:

NARRATOR: Welcome to "Window of Love".

This is one of the most popular radio shows in Vietnam. Aired live every Sunday morning, a D.J. and two counsellors answer phone queries from a mostly young audience

about sex and love. A 25-year-old soldier seeks advice on how to avoid getting his girlfriend pregnant. Dr. Hoang Thuy Hai is one of the show's experts.

DR. HAI: "In your case, if possible, like you did before, do not have sexual contact before marriage. If you cannot, in your case, I think the best thing is to use condoms."

NARRATOR: Faced with a countrywide increase in HIV infections and abortions, the half-hour live phone-in show is produced by Voice of Vietnam, with support from the UN Population Fund, UNFPA, to educate Vietnamese youth on reproductive health issues.

Emerging from a long period of isolation, Vietnam is still a traditional society. Sex is a subject that most adults are embarrassed to discuss with their children – a subject that's also not yet taught in school. But the young generation has a more open attitude. Pre-marital sex, long regarded as socially taboo, is now becoming prevalent. According to the Ministry of Health, 20- to 29-year olds are contracting HIV faster than any other age group. Tran Thi Van is UNFPA's Assistant Representative in Vietnam.

VAN: "Children need to be educated on how to use contraceptives, especially condoms."

VIDEO OUT

WILLIAMS: Dr. Piot, you've spoken about this before but how important is radio as a medium in getting this information out there?

PIOT: In many populations radio is far more accessible than television, if only because they require electricity, and there it's far more expensive to buy a television. So radio shows are important with good examples on AIDS. For example in Uganda, there's a radio show made by young people called "Straight Talk" and the name says it for itself. It is a show where on a daily basis young people can call, or anybody can call the radio station and come up with questions about sex. In India, Doordarshan Television and its associate Radio, have special programmes for truck drivers who drive at night and they can call in also about their problems. And I don't know what the name of it is, but it's also straight talk, very straight talk so that people listen.

HAMANN: To pick up on a point Adam made earlier on, obviously media executives seem to be very enthusiastic about this. They're directly involved. Have you had a chance to speak to diplomats or government representatives to see how they feel about this campaign?

PIOT: Yes. We work a lot with governments actually as a UN organization and it's very variable. But I can say that I've been working now for seven years at UNAIDS -- that's when we started -- and the last two years have been really, there has been a sea change. I think for the first time in the 20-year history of this epidemic I think we really have a chance to make a difference. There is a political and leadership commitment that was never there before.

The speeches are certainly right; actions, that's something else sometimes. There is far more money than before. When we started with UNAIDS it was 200 million dollars going to AIDS programmes in developing countries. Last year, it was 4.7 billion dollars. This is spent, not promised. And I think that there is also pressure in many countries. It's discussed in parliament, the president or prime minister is leading the national AIDS commission and so on so it is a sea change. But that doesn't mean that everybody's comfortable with discussing all the issues and that the openness is there that we need.

WILLIAMS: I have a question for the two of you and it speaks to media fatigue – you with the BBC, you with the Canadian Broadcasting Company and the Western world, the more developed world. AIDS has been on the front burner for a long time is there a kind of media fatigue that causes you to have problems reporting this information?

BROOKES: I don't know what your experience is Louis. I would say that in terms of – I'm a news reporter and trying to get stories on about AIDS require strong news angles before editors are very receptive to them. Some particular efforts, like UN AIDS Day, I think actually has been particularly effective because at least once a year it gives you a news angle which you can then employ to have a wide-ranging discussion about HIV/AIDS. But I mean, I think, you know, even if the journalists aren't jaundiced and don't have fatigue the public, particularly in some of the most developed countries, particularly here in New York – I've been reading in the last few days where we're seeing a resurgence of HIV/AIDS among certain parts of the population despite the absolute sort of overwhelming presence of awareness and information. There seems to be a risk that ordinary people at some point cease to hear the message because we've heard it so often.

HAMANN: I would tend to agree on that and I think a big difference now is that especially in Canada and here in the U.S. what you've got is people perceive the solution to this problem whether it be, you know, drugs so that people are able to live with AIDS and therefore it's a much more difficult story to sell to an editor when you've got no people dying, when you've got no sort of catastrophe. And so in that sense it's become – I think the fatigue certainly is showing signs.

WILLIAMS: When in fact on virtually every public health issue it is the repetition of the basics that actually solves the problem.

HAMANN: Odd.

BROOKES: I mean the particular spot that we just saw there a few minutes ago detailing people's responses to -- you know, demonstrating people's responses to HIV-positive people that, I think, is an example of how very, very good production values can help erode that fatigue. And I think that's extremely important in this effort.

PIOT: That it's about people not statistics.

WILLIAMS: Thank you very much Dr. Piot for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**. Our guest has been the head of UNAIDS, Dr. Peter Piot.

He was interviewed by Adam Brookes of the *BBC*, and Louis Hamann of *CBC*, the *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation*.

I'm Mary Alice Williams. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

ANNOUNCER: Electronic transcripts of this programme may be obtained free of charge by contacting World Chronicle at the address on your screen:

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