

DAILY BULLETIN



3rd Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights

February 4-7, 2008

Conference seeks to integrate HIV/AIDS with sexual health and rights

By: Sharon Davis

About 500 delegates, with representatives from each of the continents and at least 20 African countries, are expected to attend the four-day conference on Sexual Health and Rights that starts at the ICC in Abuja today. One of the draw cards for the conference, titled Sexuality, Poverty and Accountability in Africa, is the inclusion of some plenary sessions on how to integrate sexual health with HIV and AIDS.

Convenor of the conference Dr Uwemedimo Esiet said that this would be one of the first forums to talk about how to integrate HIV and AIDS with sexual health and rights, and will include 'how to' information from prominent HIV-positive women living on the African continent.

The third, bi-annual conference on sexual health is aimed at opening and deepening discussions on sexuality on the African continent with a view to assuring a sexually healthy continent, and will explore the multifaceted intersections of sexuality, poverty and accountability.

In response to media questions at a press briefing yesterday, Dr Esiet emphasized that the conference is not an investment in a big jamboree, but rather an investment in the future of Nigeria and the future of the continent.

“Every time you stimulate a conversation of this nature, you out with something new,” said Dr Esiet. “This conference is not going to be something new; it is not going to be different but it will add to our knowledge, behaviour and practices because there are many successful projects in Africa that are worth replicating.”



The conference will also deepen the integration of HIV and AIDS into sexual health, with specific sessions geared towards imparting information of the practical low down of how to achieve integration, not just advocating it.

The conference also plans to raise awareness about the continental agreement between health ministers, known as the Maputo Plan, and to call on people to hold their governments accountable for achieving the planned targets said Dr Esiet.

Cross-learning and networking will be another important outcome of the conference. “If something is working in one African country, with its unique multi-languages, multi-tribes and multi-religions, then with just a little modification it is likely to work in another African country. There is no need to reinvent the wheel,” said Dr Esiet.

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Youth Speak!

Conference youth summit debates the definition of 'youth'

By Amanda Hale

The 3rd Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights launched yesterday with a youth summit at Taraba Hall, International Conference Center, Abuja, to bring youth from Nigeria and around the world together to discuss the role of sexuality in young people's lives.

Laura Villa Torres from IPAS began the summit by welcoming youth delegates to the conference and urging young people to be open and to contribute innovative ideas throughout the week.

A key debate arising during the summit was the definition of 'youth' and where to draw the line between a young person and an adult. Many youth delegates voiced that considering the age limit of the Institute, what happens to people who are above 24 years of age?

Mrs. Nike Esiet, Executive Director at Action Health Incorporated, Lagos, voiced that the World Health Organization (WHO) defines young people as those between 10-19 years of age, while youth are defined as those between 15-24 years of age. As such, Esiet said that the conference should have a cut-off age for youth participants, because the issues deemed important to someone in their late teens or early 20's will be much different from someone in their early 30's.

Some youth participants argued that a youth is between the ages of 13 and 35, while some said that being a youth is a 'thing of the mind'. Others believed that once a person marries, that person ceases to be a youth, e.g. an unmarried 36-year-old can still be addressed as a youth and a married 23-year-old is no longer a youth.

Delegates agreed that regardless of the proper definition of what a 'youth' entails that they would join together to learn the problems faced by young people in other African countries and across the globe.

Youth involvement is at the core of this conference, with side events such as youth sexuality discussions and youth capacity events sponsored by IPPF, IPAS, IWHC, and AHI to promote dialogue between adults and youth on sensitive issues such as sexuality education, sexual violence and abuse, gender roles and traditional practices.



Youths urged to be assertive in their views on sexuality and accountability

By Nnenna Ike

As the 3rd Africa Sexuality Health and Rights Conference kicked off at the International Conference Centre Abuja, Mrs. Nike Esiet, one of the Plenary speakers and the Executive Director at Action Health Incorporated AHI, Lagos reiterated the need for governments to give a listening ear to youth perspectives on sexuality, poverty and accountability. Their correct perceptions and interpretations, according to her, would go a long way in determining the level of their participation in nation building.

Speaking at the end of the Pre-conference Youth summit, which held yesterday at the Taraba Hall of the Centre, Esiet said that the youths in Africa should be aware and conversant of the different instruments available to address the afore-mentioned issues. She maintained that though Nigeria and other African countries are signatories to a number of declarations that concern youths, sexuality, poverty and accountability, their domestication would still not yield the expected results/situation until the youths become knowledgeable of the different instruments available to put them to practise.

Esiet added that the conference would have quite a number of lawyers in attendance, so quality consideration will be given to the issues of the practicability of the local, national, and international instruments for actualising the various declarations.

She finally urged the international youth delegates and those attending from Nigeria to be vocal and to participate actively so as to ensure that they are heard and their opinions are counted.

Session Briefs



Sexuality health and rights promotion: Men's active involvement urged

By: Sharon Davis

Men have been left behind in the move to emancipate and empower women according to Nonofu Molefhi, an MP for population and development in Botswana, who is due to address delegates to the third Sexual Health and Rights Conference in Abuja today.

"I have come to the realisation that while we were focusing on empowering women, we forgot to take the men with us," said Molefhi at a press conference at the NACA offices in Abuja on Sunday. "Today's women are not the mothers of yesterday. They are professionals, they take responsibility for themselves and their families and men feel threatened because some power has been taken away from them."

MP Molefhi, who is the chair of a special committee on HIV in Botswana, explained that within Botswana men often react violently to the newfound confidence and assertiveness in women, saying it often leads to heinous crimes. Hinting that as far as men are concerned, it is acceptable for the man to terminate a relationship, but not for women to take the first step to end the relationship. This often results in violence, and even murders.

Men are generally away from home more than women, and often tend to have more than one partner, but they fail to realise that their wife will feel violated and betrayed, he said.

Molefhi is calling for campaigns not only to embrace women's rights, but also for campaigns to assist men to come to terms with contemporary society and the goal of gender equality. To achieve this he laid the responsibility at the door of government, saying they should prioritise resources to improve gender equality and also focus on sexual health issues.

The MP said that most of the money spent on sexual health and related activities were in fact donor money. "It is time that the resource came out of our own national budgets," he said.

Molefhi added that following the Abuja declaration, governments are now required to report on how the requisite 15% of health budget is spent.



Touring Abuja: A Guide to Nigeria's Capital



Abuja, the capital of Nigeria, is located in the central part of the country. Plans to move the capital from Lagos were approved in 1976, the construction was carried on throughout the 1980s.

In 1991 Abuja became Nigeria's capital. It is a modern, attractive city with many interesting buildings and villas dotting the landscape.

In a few years Abuja has become the heart of Nigeria's diplomatic activity.

Abuja's geography is defined by Aso Rock, a 400-metre monolith left by water erosion. The Presidential Complex, National Assembly, Supreme Court and much of the town extend to the south of the rock. "Aso" means "victorious" in the language of the Asokoro ("the people of victory").

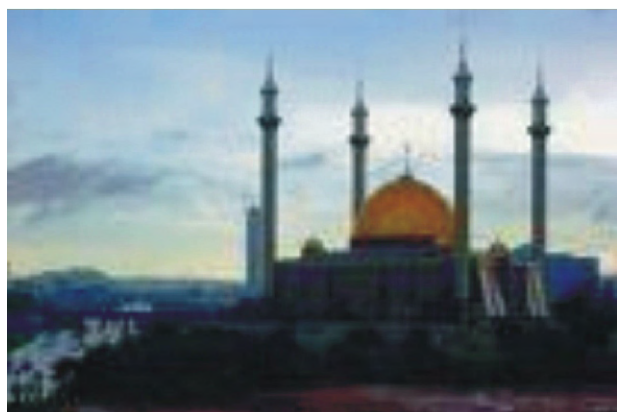
Other sights include the Nigerian National Mosque and the Nigerian National Christian Centre. The city is served by the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, while Zuma Rock lies nearby. Abuja is known for being the best purpose-built city in Africa, as well as being one of the wealthiest and most expensive.



International Conference Center, Abuja



Zuma Rock, Abuja



National Mosque, Abuja



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