

Combating HIV/ AIDS

By Soyoung Chung

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are eight international development goals that all 192 United Nations member states have agreed to achieve by the year 2015, aiming to help the world's poorest countries develop by improving their social and economic conditions. *Combating HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases* is one of the MDGs, and a number of UN agencies and affiliated organizations are currently working to halt the spread of HIV/AIDS in affected areas.

According to *Achieving the MDGs with Equity: Progress for children, challenges and disparities*, created by UNICEF in September 2010, HIV prevalence was falling, but still an estimated 33.4 million people worldwide were living with HIV in 2008. Of these, 4.9 million were young people between 15-24 years old, and 2.1 million were children under 15. The vast majority of HIV infections occurred in Sub-Saharan Africa, and girls and young women were found to be especially vulnerable to HIV infection. "Achieving an AIDS-free generation is possible if the international community steps up efforts to provide universal access to HIV prevention, treatment and social protection" according to *Children and AIDS: Fifth Stocktaking Report 2010*, published jointly by several UN agencies. Although new HIV infections seem to be stabilizing, the fact that at least one in 20 young people is still living with HIV today has alarmed many UN agencies and organizations to take measures.



Because a large proportion of HIV cases are transmitted sexually, and UN programs to prevent unintended pregnancy and HIV infection were still separate in those areas, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) started helping to integrate these services in several countries in 2010. In Djibouti, they assisted the Ministry of Health equip clinics with testing equipment for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections and increased the availability of condoms. In Maldives, many young people gained access to information about HIV and its prevention at a concert co-organized by UNFPA and the Society for Health Education in the Maldives on World AIDS Day. These efforts were continued in several other countries, including Burundi, Macedonia, and Venezuela.

As disseminating comprehensive and correct knowledge of HIV and AIDS is essential to prevent the spread of the epidemic, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has also been involved in educating vulnerable individuals, especially young adolescents living in rural areas. Only 31% of young men and 19% of young women between the ages of 15-24 years old in those areas had been exposed to the knowledge of HIV/AIDS.

Because HIV/AIDS is associated with many other social issues, including health, human rights, environment and population, UNAIDS, a joint UN program on HIV/AIDS, has been working exclusively to make a difference for vulnerable children, women and men living in a world with HIV and AIDS, providing necessary resources to indeed achieve an AIDS-free generation.