



The OECS Secretariat joins the HIV/AIDS Community in celebrating WORLD AIDS DAY.

Historically when there was much uncertainty/trepidation amongst population groups and the possibility that risk/threat to human survival was exceptionally high, civilized societies opted to put in place agreements among its citizen that will regulate the individual behaviour in respect of each other that would give equal opportunity for survival.

Such agreements are fundamentally the bases for 'human rights', which inform on the common entitlements of every citizen and are enforceable by the state. The entitlements can take the form of privileges and opportunities many of which must gain expression through the provision of goods and services.

Unfortunately provisioning has its challenges such as scarcity, distance/location, varying needs and unequal capacities in intelligence, physical attributes including strength and health status that can inhibit the full realization of this equal opportunity goal/endeavour. The only sure way therefore of ensuring the full realization of these rights/entitlements is through a universal access approach in which the good and services needed for an adequate quality of life are made available/accessible to all according to his/her need without reference to race, creed, religious conviction/persuasion, sexual orientation, occupation, inherited characteristics or health status/condition. However there is need to be aware of the restrictions to universal access which includes: (i) the ability to pay, note that the generation of funds encourages productivity; (ii) compliance with administrative procedure, that is to ensure proper planning and administration of the services; and (iii) the eligibility criteria usually technical determined to rule out abuse. The HIV/AIDS epidemic presents us with a similar 'modern-day' scenario.

After two decades of variable levels of effort to reverse the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic,

there is evidence that the impact of these efforts has been significantly reduced as a result of violations of these human rights even though there is an acceptance of a core set of universal and inalienable rights which are integral to the well being of the world's citizens. More specifically, we acknowledge that the epidemic not only feeds on the high levels of poverty and unemployment, but also gender and other inequalities, and the considerable stigma and discrimination all of which continue to impact negatively the lives of HIV positive people (PLHIV).

Unfortunately, in the Caribbean previous efforts seem negligible in removing the punitive laws and changing the discriminatory policies and practices which serve to compound the situation and create "major barriers to citizens/residents accessing HIV related prevention, treatment and testing services.

The recent removal of grant funding for the Human Rights desks not only highlighted the low level of priority being accorded the observance of the human rights of PLHIV but also the need for the empowerment of PLHIV, and for proper client management systems anchored in confidentiality, effectiveness and accessibility. In addition, the level of psychosocial stress related factors associated with (a) stigma and discrimination, (b) the HIV/AIDS disease itself, and (c) the treatment and care are high, and threatens to increase as the PLHIV community matures. This situation not only reduces productivity, but perpetuates stigma and discrimination and negatively affects the lives of PLHIV and other vulnerable populations. Therefore proper management of PLHIV consistent with the global commitment to universal access which is grounded in long-recognized international human rights frameworks needs to be ubiquitous, assured and promoted.

The OECS Secretariat through the HIV/AIDS Global Fund Project has recently been mandated to ensure that "Universal Rights" are accorded to people infected and affected within its participating states (Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia and St Vincent and the Grenadines) by addressing stigma and discrimination through the upgrading and maintenance of fully functional human rights desks. The HIV/AIDS Project Unit (HAPU) therefore will embark on a series of interventions that will (a) provide life skills for PLHIV while promoting the benefits of prevention, (b) train persons in the techniques for coping with stigma and discrimination, (c) provide direct support to associates of PLHIV and other vulnerable populations and (d) promote and advocate for the human rights of these populations.

On a positive note, it is recognized by key decision makers that human rights is a fundamental issue that if not addressed can be detrimental to programmes and activities being implemented in the fight against HIV/AIDS within the region. The HAPU looks forward to working with all

partners in the effort to reduce stigma and discrimination and ultimately ensure universal access to all – a basic human right.

Other Links:

- [World AIDS Day Campaign](#)
- [The Body: The complete HIV/AIDS Resource](#)