Posts spread HIV prevention message

Thanks to a unique collaboration between the UPU and UNAIDS, Posts around the world are participating in an awareness campaign on how to prevent human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Also onboard are the International Labour Organization and UNI Global Union.
About two million people died of AIDS in 2007.

Halting the spread of HIV by 2015 is one of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG). To make this a reality, the UPU and UNAIDS together with the ILO and UNI Global are joining forces to increase HIV awareness by launching a global campaign in July 2009. Post offices in participating countries will become information hubs on HIV, reaching out to the general public and postal employees. Posts will be at the forefront of raising awareness about this virus, in line with the UPU’s commitment to sustainable development and achieving the MDGs.

At the heart of the campaign is the Posts’ unrivalled physical network – its 660,000 post offices – that will ensure that both staff and customers are made aware of HIV prevention. Stopping new cases of HIV is crucial to curbing the spread of acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS). And awareness-raising through a campaign like this one is an important way of spreading the message.

HIV affects millions of individuals and continues to cut a swathe through the world’s population. According to UNAIDS figures, an estimated 33 million people live with HIV and there are nearly 7,500 new cases of HIV infection everyday. About two million individuals died of AIDS-related diseases in 2007. And the UPU wants to help. Many Posts already promote health, including the prevention of HIV, providing further testimony to their social role. “This awareness-raising campaign is part of the UPU’s ongoing effort to promote sustainable development and social responsibility among postal operators,” says UPU Director General Edouard Dayan.

Global reach

Alison Phillips-Pearce, the UNAIDS campaign coordinator, said that the joint initiative will have an “enormous outreach, making the campaign very global”, given the Posts’ vast physical network. Also, the network has a special characteristic. “The Post is a place that is open to everyone from the young to the old and does not discriminate against anyone,” Phillips-Pearce adds.

Claude Montellier, head of the sustainable development programme at the UPU, believes that much could be done through the Posts, given that they already provide universal access to information. “Promoting social responsibility can take place through the development of awareness programmes about diseases for postal staff and the public,” he says. He adds that it was the Post’s unique position that led the UPU to consider ways the postal network could benefit the public at large. In 2007, the UPU organized a seminar on sustainable development, attended by various international organizations under the UN umbrella. The UPU then approached the World Health Organization about starting an HIV campaign. It was the WHO that suggested UNAIDS as a suitable partner. The other partners were also a natural fit.

Two years later, the campaign is a reality. To help Posts achieve the campaign’s aims, UNAIDS created bold materials, including posters, postcards and fast facts. The cam-

The bold campaign materials are available in seven languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish.

To LEARN MORE ABOUT HIV visit www.unaids.org/preventHIV
“The Post is a place that is open to everyone from the young to the old and does not discriminate against anyone.”

Alison Phillips-Pearce, UNAIDS

Living with HIV and AIDS

33,000,000 people live with HIV worldwide.

67% of all people with HIV live in Africa, where AIDS is the leading cause of death.

7,500 new cases of HIV occur everyday.

700,000 people are infected with HIV in western and Central Europe.

2,000,000 people died of AIDS in 2007.

HIV in campaign pioneer countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>People living with HIV (estimate)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>191,791,000</td>
<td>730,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>14,784,000</td>
<td>130,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>18,500,000</td>
<td>540,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>1,328,630,000</td>
<td>700,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>1,300,000</td>
<td>9,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>12,337,000</td>
<td>100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>148,000,000</td>
<td>2,600,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Campaign will have three stages. The first phase will target postal customers with the participation of seven pioneering countries. These pioneers – Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, China, Estonia, Mali and Nigeria – were selected based on their geographical spread and disease prevalence rates. Estonia, for example, has Europe’s highest rate of HIV infection. During the campaign’s initial phase, nearly 24,000 post offices worldwide will display and distribute the information materials. And this number will rise once other UPU members join the ranks of the seven pioneering countries in 2010. The second phase – also in 2010 – will target postal workers and the third stage in 2011 will be a philatelic campaign on the discovery of AIDS.

Consultative process
For UNAIDS’ part, Phillips-Pearce shed light on why the campaign materials had taken their chosen form. “The materials were the outcome of a consultative process with our partners. Based on previous experience, we knew that we had to have a message that would catch people’s eye while at the post office.” The materials were tested on a global level and across genders. Participants were asked to comment on the original 14 designs; the goal here was to find out if the message was clear. The end result was the slogan: “Your post office cares. Protect yourself.” However, some countries may adapt the slogan in line with their reality. “An adaptable slogan was needed to ensure that the message was meaningful to the country it is displayed in,” Phillips-Pearce said. In Brazil, for example, a more direct message was required, so the slogan on campaign materials there will read: “Your post office cares. Protect yourself. Wear a condom.”

Cameroon Post is hoping that its 220 outlets will make an impact on the country’s HIV prevalence rates. It is the first time that this postal operator has participated in a health campaign and there is a good reason why. “HIV and AIDS touch the lives of a very large part of our population,” says campaign coordinator, Mireille Ndancha Njilla. She believes raising awareness of the virus is crucial. This especially in a country where just over five per cent of the local population aged between 15 and 49 are thought to be living with HIV, according to UNAIDS’ latest figures.

The campaign’s second phase will focus on postal employees in 2010 with help from the ILO and UNI Global Union. The ILO is preparing a toolkit for postal employers to use to inform their staff about HIV. UNI Global is working on gaining the support of both the Posts and the unions for this phase. The third phase is planned for 2011, where the UPU will invite its member countries to issue a stamp to commemorate the discovery of AIDS. It was in 1981 that the first scientific article related to this disease was published. Shortly afterwards, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – part of the United States department for health – coined the term “Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome”.

The seven national pioneers are all set for the campaign’s official launch. If you are a member country that wishes to do its part to halt the spread of HIV, please contact Claude Montellier, UPU head of sustainable development, (claude.montellier@upu.int; +41 31 350 3209) or his assistant, Ariane Proulx, (ariane.proulx@upu.int; +41 31 350 3582).