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ICC to promote HIV protection

The International Cricket Council will team up with UNAIDS, UNICEF and the Caribbean Broadcast Media Partnership on HIV/AIDS at the ICC Cricket World Cup 2007 to highlight the situation of children and young people living with and affected by HIV.

More than two billion television viewers are expected to tune in to the seven week long tournament, which begins with an opening ceremony on March 11 in Jamaica.

Activities at the event will draw attention to the issues facing children and young people affected by HIV and highlight the resources and actions required to address them.

The public, especially young people aged 15-24, will get information on the stigma and discrimination around HIV and on how to protect themselves against the virus. The partnership is part of the ICC's commitment to promoting the Spirit of Cricket and its positive impact on society.

"The Spirit of Cricket is a special part of our game and is a concept that stretches beyond the boundaries of the outfield," said ICC president Percy Sonn.

"We hope the range of activities delivered at the ICC Cricket World Cup 2007 will make a difference to raising awareness and reducing stigma around HIV in the Caribbean and across the ever-growing cricket world. By encouraging high profile players to support this campaign, we hope to be able to engage those who may otherwise be difficult to reach."

Through high profile activities around cricket's biggest event, the ICC will support the Unite for Children, Unite against AIDS campaign launched in 2005 by UNICEF, UNAIDS and other partners.

The ICC is also being supported by the Caribbean Broadcast Media Partnership on HIV/AIDS, a coalition of over 50 broadcasters in 23 Caribbean countries and territories.

The CBMP's new regional media campaign, LIVE UP, aims to inspire the people of the Caribbean, especially the youth, to consider what they can do to stem the spread of HIV.

"The exceptional reach of broadcast media in the Caribbean gives us a unique opportunity to educate audiences about how to avoid HIV, and how to combat the stigma and discrimination that surround the disease," noted CBMP steering committee chair Allyson Leacock.

"By doing what we do best, communicating with our neighbours, members of the CBMP are helping our audience to remain healthy and well-informed, while we all work together to reduce the impact of HIV in our region."

The CBMP is producing a series of televised public services announcements, as part of an ongoing media campaign, targeted to young people. This will be debuted by Caribbean broadcasters during the event.

The spots encourage young people to take action to prevent HIV infection, including talking openly with parents, teachers and friends about HIV, being informed, using protection and getting tested. Viewers will be encouraged to visit a new website, www.iliveup.com, providing information, local resources and the stories of young people affected by HIV.

A series of PSAs have been produced, each lasting 30 seconds, which will be available to broadcasters free of charge. The PSAs feature leading players, including Ricky Ponting from Australia and Rahul Dravid from India, speaking about how HIV affects children.

Players and officials from each team will wear the red and blue ribbon of the Unite for Children, Unite against AIDS campaign during their first games and during the final. Players will also visit programmes supporting children and young people affected by HIV.

"Young people today have never known a world without AIDS. Sports stars - such as top cricket players - can act as role models for today's young generation and reach out to them on AIDS issues," said UNAIDS executive director Dr Peter Piot.

"Sport is a force for change that can break down barriers, build self-esteem and teach life skills and social behaviour. By highlighting AIDS issues, the ICC Cricket World Cup and its cricketing stars are showing exactly the kind of exceptional response needed for the exceptional challenge of AIDS."

The Unite for Children, Unite Against Aids campaign promotes four key areas: prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV, the virus that causes AIDS; increased access to antiretroviral therapy for children and young people who need treatment; education programmes to help prevent HIV transmission; and increased support for children who are orphaned and left vulnerable by AIDS.

"Children have been the missing face of the AIDS pandemic," said UNICEF executive director Ann M Veneman. "The International Cricket Council will be a powerful ally in ensuring that children are at the heart of the global response to the epidemic."

Cricket is popular in many of the countries that are most impacted by AIDS, including India and South Africa. Together, these two countries are home to around 11 million of the 40 million people estimated to be living with HIV.

In the Caribbean, UNAIDS estimated that 250,000 people were living with HIV in 2006, 15,000 of which were children aged 0-14 years. It was also estimated that in 2006, 1.1 per cent of young women and 0.5 per cent of young men aged 15-24 were living with HIV in the Caribbean and that around 27,000 people became newly infected with the virus in 2006 alone.

Cricket is also a major sport in many donor countries that are active in the global AIDS response, including Australia, Canada, England, Holland and New Zealand - all competitors in the ICC Cricket World Cup 2007.