

Batting for HIV/AIDS

Massive HIV/AIDS campaign to be launched at CWC opening ceremony

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COME tomorrow, thousands of cricket fans witnessing the opening ceremony for the International Cricket Council (ICC) Cricket World Cup 2007 in Trelawny, will also witness the launch of the "LIVE UP: Love Protect Respect" mass campaign, aimed at strengthening the fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS.

But what makes this campaign unique is that it is made possible through the coalition of more than 50 television and radio broadcasters in 23 countries across the Caribbean - Caribbean Broadcast Media Partnership on HIV/AIDS (CBMP) - in collaboration with ICC Cricket World Cup 2007. Making it the "first pan-Caribbean effort led by broadcasters to inspire and empower young people to help stem the spread of HIV/AIDS across the region".

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During a tele-conference with approximately 3,500 journalists across the region on Thursday, Sir George Alleyne, chairman of the CBMP steering committee, said he believes the campaign will have a perennial impact on the fight against the spread of

HIV/AIDS.

"I feel very strongly that the campaign will have a long and lasting impact," Alleyne said, adding that stigma and discrimination impede adequate response to stemming the spread of HIV/AIDS. "I believe that this campaign is historic and marks an important milestone in the fight against HIV/AIDS."

Components of the campaign include radio and television public service announcements (PSA) that will be aired during the matches. In addition, a player from each of the 16 competing teams have been selected as ambassadors, and will travel to outreach centres throughout the Caribbean spreading the Live Up campaign messages.

John Long, ICC spokesman, said the campaign will help to raise awareness about the AIDS pandemic. Meanwhile, according to Dr Amery Browne, technical director of the AIDS Coordinating Committee in Trinidad and Tobago, the

Caribbean region has the most people affected by HIV/AIDS in this hemisphere, and is second only to sub-Saharan Africa.

"Thirty thousand persons (in the Caribbean) were infected in the last 12 months," he said, adding that the Caribbean currently had an infection rate of between one and three per cent.

In the Caribbean, AIDS is a leading cause of death among adults ages 15 to 44, while some 250,000 residents are living with HIV or AIDS.

The CBMP was inspired by the Global Media AIDS Initiative (GMAI), launched in January 2004 by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, and developed by the Kaiser Family Foundation and UNAIDS. In addition to the partnership's on-air activities, the CBMP organises creative workshops to develop new programming on HIV/AIDS, develops and distributes original, rights-free programming, and provides briefings and training on HIV issues to regional journalists, editors, producers, and on-air personalities.