

Pre-Conference: From November 30-December 2, 2008, over 250 young people convened at Centre Aere de la BCEAO in Dakar Senegal for the Pre-Conference—a 3-day workshop that prepared youth participants to advocate for youth priorities at the International Conference on AIDS and STIs in Africa (ICASA). By the end of the Pre-Conference, the participants agreed on a Youth Communique that any passionate, young person in Africa can use as a tool to advocate for youth to be at the forefront of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. The Communique was presented at the Closing Ceremony of ICASA, by a 17-year old girl from Senegal.

To review the Communique in English or French click the following links:

<http://files.tigggroups.org/77531/COMMUNIQUE_YOUTHFRONT_2008_latest_French.doc.word>

<http://files.tigggroups.org/77533/ICASA_YOUTHFRONT_COMMUNIQUE_2008.doc.word>

Candlelight Vigil on Goree Island: On the evening of World AIDS Day, participants of the Pre-Conference took a 20-minute ride on a ferry to Goree Island. A candlelight vigil was facilitated by the YouthFront to commemorate the lives of those that have fought long and hard to combat the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Historically, Goree Island is known as the "host of the slaves," as a symbol for the struggles of the Black Diaspora, one of them being the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Despite the struggle, African youth stood united on World AIDS Day and proclaimed to the world on Gorree Island, "Yes, we can We can combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic."

Youth Pavilion: The Youth Pavilion was the centre of youth activities in ICASA. The pavilion was the host of events and sessions coordinated by youth and for youth and adult allies. Young people presented their projects throughout the day and networked to share ideas in the future.

Commitment Desk: As youth we realize that we have to hold our government officials, civil society, community members, and the media accountable. However, we also need to hold ourselves accountable in order to be effective leaders! Youth at ICASA participated in the Commitments Desk by writing a commitment that they would promise to do by the next ICASA (in 2011)! Youth that participated in the Commitments Desk, signed a banner that was hung in the Youth Pavillion during the course of ICASA. The YouthFront will follow-up to ensure that they keep that promise.

Advocacy Campaign: The YouthFront developed campaign messages for youth prior to the conference and these messages were disseminated and presented at the Pre-Conference, the community rally—the day before the Main Conference and at the Youth Pavilion.

The messages were—

Don't Delay: Every day of inaction costs us over 6,000 lives.

Leadership: If not us who? If not now when? If not here where? If not you who? If not now when? If not Africa which?

Access: Comprehensive, youth-friendly health services, prevention, treatment, voluntary counseling and testing. Universal access NOW!

Youth Closing Ceremony: At ICASA 2008, the YouthFront took on the leadership to develop steps to action beyond the conference and certainly beyond hope. The session, ""What's next for young people after ICASA?" was moderated by Sydney Hushie, South Secretariat of Global Youth Coalition on HIV/AIDS (GYCA) on December 5, 2008, at the Youth Pavilion. This session created a space for young advocates and adult allies to engage in a dialogue with panel speakers on youth leadership beyond ICASA. The presenters were Dr. Akinyele Dairo, Senior Programme Advisor for the African Division of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); David Anna from Save the Children; and, Esther Eshiet, West Africa-Regional Focal Point of GYCA.

A young man from Mozambique asked, "What can young people do to improve their work?" Dr. Dairo's response was that being successful starts with you. Youth consistently ask for opportunities to use their skills, but their skills are usually not developed enough. Youth need to train themselves and ensure that they are equipped to take on these leadership positions. Dr. Dairo encouraged youth to "Act now. Don't wait for opportunities. You have to make it happen." Dr. Dairo's message was in tune with a banner hanging in the Youth Pavilion that featured one of the YouthFront advocacy messages: Leadership.