

26th International Candle Light Memorial

17th May, 2009

Background:

May 17 of this year was the annual 26th International AIDS Candle Light Memorial, a program of the Global Health Council, and one of the largest and oldest grassroots mobilization campaigns for HIV/AIDS awareness in the world. The Candlelight Memorial Day was first observed in 1983 in the USA. It is now being observed across the globe every year on the third Sunday of May. Lighting candles has become a way for the communities to take action by mourning publicly and by strengthening local and national commitments to fight the pandemic. It is led by volunteer coordinators who host memorials for their communities worldwide. In this 26th year, the Candlelight ceremony at national level honors all those who have been affected by the AIDS pandemic.

Summary:

About two hundred people gathered to commemorate lives lost in Bangladesh due to HIV/AIDS. People from all walks of life came together at BIAM auditorium to share and express solidarity and support for lives affected by HIV/AIDS- for those who have lost loved ones, to those who provide support to people living with HIV, from health care professionals to the business sector looking for ways to support their community in addressing this disease.

The occasion started with recitation from holly Quraan followed by speech of the guests including representative of National AIDS/STD Programme, Self Help Group (Ashar Alo Society & Mukta Akash Bangladesh) and National & International NGOs.



Fig: occasion was demised by lighting of the candles and sharing a moment of silence

In closing lighting of the candles and sharing a moment of silence together with the view to convey heartfelt condolence and honor to the departed souls for AIDS created a unique feeling in each mind their.



Fig: the day observed with representation from GO, NGO & CBO

The program at national level was organized by National AIDS/STD Programme (NASP) with Primary initiative from Ashar Alo Society (a SHG of PLHIV) followed by intensive assistance to NASP throughout the whole process. Other assistance and participation were from Mukta Akash Bangladesh (SHG of PLHIV), Bondhu Social welfare society (SHG of MSM), Family Health International, Save the Children USA, Action Aid Bangladesh, CCDB, Matra, ICDDR,B, HASAB, Confidential Approach to AIDS Prevention, BWHC, UNAIDS, UNODC.

Facts:

On the occasion, National AIDS/STD Program (NASP) organized a programme at the Biam auditorium in the city remembering people who died of AIDS in Bangladesh.

Speaking as the chief guest, Dr Hosne Ara Tahmin, additional director general of Directorate General of Health Services, said prevention is always better than cure and for that mass awareness is a must. Children of the persons who died of AIDS are suffering immensely. The government will make an attempt to provide them with support so that they can continue their education, she said.

Dr Md Ishaque Khan, line director of NASP, said the social stigma about AIDS should be eliminated and AIDS-infected people should not be discriminated.

One of distinguished guest said according to the 8th sero surveillance report HIV prevalence is around 8 among the IDUs in the country that is really dangerous. The

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vulnerable and victims are mostly the young people. Today in this day our oath should be- "We will work together, so that nobody will be infected with HIV from the time onward". Since the beginning of the pandemic, AIDS has claimed more than 28 million lives around the world while about 42 millions are now living with HIV and AIDS worldwide. In Bangladesh so far 165 people died of AIDS while 58 died in the last one year.

Bondhu Social Welfare Society presented a cultural function titled 'Essence of Soul' on the occasion while



Fig: Cultural program conducted by Bondhu Social welfare society

The program comprises of the sense of Stigma and discrimination towards PLHAs that includes the existing practice regarding attitude for them in country context and consequences as well. The good impact of positive attitude towards PLHA was the closing remarks.

Ashar Alo Society displayed a documentary show on AIDS named "*HARANOR ONUBHUTI*" that actually reflected the picture of discrimination & sorrow of HIV infected and affected. It was a good and great initiative to make surface their misery & pain. It created the realization among people that still there is enough scope to enhance existing Care and Support in this country for PLHIV. The scenario reflected through sharing story of the PLHAs and their relatives.

Mother lost her son

"I lost my husband and mother in the year 2008. But the third death in the same year was intolerable to me. It was my son died from AIDS. He was a young chap; I had a good hope, ambition and dream around my son. All finished. Furthermore he left his wife and siblings during death. How can I manage and continue their livelihood. What can I do? Please tell me"

Wife lost her husband

"I lost my husband 6 month back. I have a sibling I became the victim of HIV through my husband. My In laws get out me after my husband's death. I am helpless

now and near to begging. Some SHG and NGOs are providing some help but not enough to meet the needs".

"I am the most unfortunate and unhappy woman in the world. My husband died few days before birth of my son. My son born with orphan identity. After his birth my brother in law told me to go to my parent's home and not to return. What is my future? What is my son's future?"

Daughter lost her father

"My father died. I have to give up my study. People hate us because my father died of HIV. After intervention of AAS and some other NGOs our neighbors started to accept us but the inner complex in my mind is never ending"

The scenario summon for providing Care to the infected and affected as much as possible from each end and corner of the country in one's mind.

The programme was participated by family members who lost their near and dear ones from AIDS and different government and non-government organizations working with HIV awareness Programmes. [Source: *The Daily Star, 18 June 2009, Dhaka*] . Media coverage was conducted by NTV and Channel -I.

Closing:

The occasion was demised by lighting of the candles and sharing a moment of silence together with the view to convey heartfelt condolence and honor to the departed souls for AIDS.

Local Initiatives at different corner of the country

Geon Health Foundation, GHF (self-help Group of PLHIV works in Khulna division of Bangladesh) marked the *26th World Candle Light Memorial Day, 2009* in a befitting manner. It was held at Regional



Fig: the day was observed at southern part of the country with initiative of SHG of PLHAs

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Folk Administration Centre, Khulna. The ceremony was jointly organized by Geon Health Foundation and World Vision Bangladesh.

CCD Bangladesh has taken up daylong program commemorating those who died of HIV/AIDS and wishing long lives for those infected internalizing the slogan of this year "Together we Are the solution".

The program was held on AIDS awareness campaign at Rajshahi (Northern part of Bangladesh) beside the National initiative in observance of the international day this year. Similar types of program, wishing long lives for the HIV/AIDS infected and in honor of the deceased were performed in the day, in more than 100 countries around the world. Expressing solidarity with this international program, CCD Bangladesh and its wings Bangladesh Advanced Students Alliance (BASA), Rajshahi Youth Citizens Council, Youth Voice and Women's Empowerment Network (WEN) organized this program.



Fig: the day was observed at Northern part of the country with local initiative

Ashar Alo Society the key initiator to observed the day in country at national level also observed the day locally at Chittagong and Sylhet beside intensive involvement and participation in the National program centrally.

Representative from CBOs and NGOs including HASAB participated the program.



Fig: the day was observed at Eastern part of the country with initiative of PLHAs SHG

HASAB, besides participating in the national program took a different initiative regarding promoting services and it's access to the Infected and affected people in the country.

আমরা এইচ আইভি আক্রান্তদের সুস্থভাবে বেঁচে থাকতে সেবা ও সহায়তা দিয়ে থাকি

- রক্তে এইচ আইভি সনাক্তকরণের জন্য গোপনীয়তাসহ উল্লেখ্য কন্ডোমিনাম এন্ড টেস্টিং
- যৌনরোগের চিকিৎসা
- এইচ আইভি ও এইডস আক্রান্তদের সুযোগসন্ধানী রোগের চিকিৎসা
- এইডস আক্রান্তদের জন্য এন্টি রেট্রোভাইরাল চিকিৎসা ব্যবস্থা
- সম্পূর্ণ পারিবারিক আবহে অস্থায়ী আশ্রয়কেন্দ্রে এইচ আইভি এবং এইডস আক্রান্তদের প্রয়োজনীয় মানসিক, শারীরিক ও পুষ্টিসেবা

আমাদের সেবা সমূহ

এছাড়াও হাসাব প্রয়োজনে হটলাইন কাউন্সেলিং সেবা দিয়ে থাকে, এই নাম্বারে

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