

## **World AIDS Day**

### **State-level Function on World AIDS Day-2007 at Regional Research Laboratory Auditorium, Bhubaneswar on 01.12.2007**

It is a great pleasure for me to be here this morning at this State Level Function organized by Orissa State AIDS Control Society to observe World AIDS Day. Observance of this day signifies our concern for this dreaded disease and also to express our solidarity to fight against it to check its alarming rise. The very purpose of this day is also to generate much needed awareness among the masses about AIDS.

It is heartening to note that the Orissa State AIDS Control Society has organized a number of activities to mark the occasion with the sole aim to make the community aware of on HIV/ AIDS. The society has also taken up various activities like prevention of new infection, inter personal communication, running Integrated Counseling Testing Centres in the state and Tele-Counseling Centres in three medical colleges, sexually transmitted diseases clinic besides taking up school AIDS education programme, care and support and treatment programmes right through out the year. It is also coordinating with other agencies and NGOs for proper implementation of different AIDS control and awareness programmes in the state. I appreciate the commitment on the part of the Society to improve the situation in the state where 7513 numbers of people are living with HIV/ AIDS till October, 2007 as per the recent survey report. I am sure it will continue to work with renewed spirit and vigour to achieve its mission.

The spread of Human Immuno Deficiency Virus all over the world, cutting across geographical, economic, social barriers today poses a serious challenge to the survival of humanity at large. In view of this reality, the concern to control and to get cure from HIV/ AIDS demands utmost priority not only of the Government and health administration but also of the society as well.

AIDS, the final stage of HIV infection has evolved from a mysterious illness to a global pandemic. Since the first case of AIDS was identified in Chennai in 1986 it has grown alarmingly and now there are approximately 57 lakh people are living with HIV in the country. The threat of AIDS has entered the average Indian household. No longer confined to high-risk groups like commercial sex workers, truckers and migrant population, youth and women are also finding them at the risk of getting infected mainly because of their social and economic vulnerability. Besides this, limited access to health

information and healthcare services and socio-cultural causes are also increasing their vulnerability to HIV.

The state of Orissa is also now under the grip of AIDS as there are several highly prevalent districts. This is a matter of serious concern and it needs to be dealt with a sense of urgency before it causes serious damage. Although Orissa is placed in the category of low prevalence states, high degrees of migration of people from the state in search of labour and other related factors like poverty, ignorance contributed largely to the increased risk of HIV / AIDS. Repeated and continuous intervention programmes with coordination of different departments are showing positive results. It is also heartening to see a large number of NGOs besides agencies of United Nations are lending a helping hand to the Government in tackling the menace of AIDS. But there are miles to go and no time for complacency. I am sure with their concerted efforts the community will be sensitized on various aspects of the disease.

I find, the theme for this year's World AIDS Day and also for the next year is "Leadership" and this theme will continue to be promoted with the campaigning slogan "Stop AIDS keep the promise". The theme is an appropriate one as it will encourage leadership at all levels and sectors of society to tackle AIDS. It is proved that a strong and committed leadership helps immensely achieving the goal. Leaders are distinguished by their action, innovation and vision and their perseverance to move ahead and motivate others in the face of hurdles and challenges. The leaders are not expected to be found in the highest offices but the quality of leadership can be demonstrated at every level whether in family, community or in society. Much of the best leadership on AIDS has been demonstrated within civil society organizations to fight against the rising of AIDS. Very recently I had the pleasure of inaugurating a State Level Convention of "Role of Panchayats in addressing HIV and AIDS in Orissa" where elected women representative of Panchayati Raj Institutions from across the state had participated. I was greatly impressed seeing their leadership quality and commitment to make people aware on the problems of this dreaded disease. I saw in their eyes the enthusiasm and the strong desire to lead from the front in ensuring safe future to their fellow brothers and sisters. So there is urgent need to create leaders at all levels so that they inspire and motivate the community to become well informed on AIDS.

The most concerning part is that AIDS dramatically reduces life expectancy and economic potential increasing the vulnerability of future generations. The greatest tragedy is loss of lives particularly of youth in their most productive age, which resulted

in a major impact on the progress and development of the country. So time has come to get real about HIV/ AIDS and to make our youths aware of various means of AIDS transmission and how to say no to AIDS. With no vaccine yet to be evolved, the only feasible methods of controlling the spread of disease is through behavioral modification. The need of hour is to educate the community about the virus and disease, modes of transmission and means of protection. Widespread use of media both of Print and Electronic is essential to create supportive environment in the public sphere.

The roots of the tree are most important for its survival. Let all are efforts create leaders in the society to strengthen the roots on which the tree of our future generation would grow and spread its branches of all-round prosperity. On this very day let us rededicate ourselves so that our efforts halt and eventually reverse the global epidemic.

Jai Hind.