



**ABOUT THE MEXICO YOUTHFORCE**  
**Young people and adult allies advocate for youth HIV issues  
at the XVII International AIDS Conference in Mexico City**

**What is the Mexico YouthForce?:**

The Mexico YouthForce is a wide-ranging coalition of non-governmental and international organizations that promotes and facilitates meaningful youth participation and youth-adult partnerships to raise the visibility of youth HIV and AIDS issues before, during, and after the XVII International AIDS Conference through concrete action. It is coordinated by Advocates for Youth, Ave de Mexico, the Global Youth Coalition on HIV/AIDS, TakingITGlobal, and Youth Coalition. The YouthForce works in close partnership with the World AIDS Campaign and is supported by UNFPA, UNESCO, UNICEF, the Summit Foundation, the Gates Foundation, and Plan International.

At the 2002 International AIDS Conference (IAC) in Barcelona, Spain, an international network of young people and adult allies involved in HIV programs from over 40 organizations came together and formed the Barcelona YouthForce. The YouthForce's goals were to raise the visibility of youth issues and highlight the lack of youth participation at the conference. At the 2004 IAC in Bangkok, Thailand, the YouthForce played a pivotal role in pushing youth issues onto the agenda. In Toronto, Canada in 2006, the YouthForce continued its efforts, working with the IAC's own AIDS2006 Youth Programme to increase youth participation at the conference, to continue to prioritize youth HIV issues, and to highlight the need for youth-adult partnerships. In Toronto, the YouthForce launched the Youth-Adults Commitments Desk. Young advocates collected 344 commitments to invest in young people from decision-makers, prominent leaders, activists and civil society.

These strategies have been so successful during the past three IACs in Barcelona, Bangkok, and Toronto, that the YouthForce has been widely hailed as critical in placing and maintaining youth issues at the forefront of the international HIV and AIDS agenda. The IAC planning team now develops programming and special events focused on youth-issues to make sure that youth delegates can make the most of the conference's opportunities for training, learning, advocacy and networking.

**Goals of the Mexico YouthForce:**

With nearly half of all new HIV infections occurring in young people 15-25, there is still an urgent need for global and regional advocacy efforts to keep and raise youth issues on the agenda, particularly surrounding HIV prevention in low-income countries.

The objectives of the Mexico YouthForce are:

1. To empower young people from both high and low income countries to be effective advocates at the conference;
2. To facilitate the collaboration of stakeholders committed to youth HIV and AIDS issues at the conference;
3. To promote youth participation and the inclusion of youth issues in the mainstream conference agenda, in media generated from the conference, and in HIV and AIDS programs and policies in general; and
4. To gain and achieve international and individual commitments which promote youth leadership and mitigate the impact of HIV and AIDS on young people.

**YouthForce activities prior to the IAC, in collaboration with the AIDS2008 Youth Programme:**

<http://www.youthaids2008.org>: The interactive Mexico YouthForce website serves as a clearinghouse of information for youth conference attendees and the media, and showcases the work of youth reporters during the conference on an e-group, delegates' online profiles, blogs, podcasts, and webcasts of sessions. The site will also provide information about conference activities to youth who cannot physically attend the conference.

**Youth Media Workshop:** On July 30<sup>th</sup>, YouthForce spokespeople, Agentes de Cambio, and youth delegates living with HIV will participate in a day of media workshops to learn effective communication and interviewing skills, reporting techniques on new media such as blogging and podcasting, and how to work with large numbers of requests for media interviews. The workshop for youth living with HIV is organized by the World AIDS Campaign and funded by UNFPA.

**Youth Pre-Conference:** Over the 2½ days of the Youth Pre-Conference, almost 300 young delegates from around the world will attend informative and skills-building workshops, all in both English and Spanish with many sessions led by young people, in order to train and empower attendees with technical information, advocacy training, and media skills to better advocate on the issues affecting young people at the main conference, in other fora, and within their home countries. The Youth Pre-Conferences at the 2004 IAC in Bangkok and the 2006 IAC in Toronto were critical in strengthening effective youth participation during the main conference.

**Youth Reception:** This event celebrates the increased participation of youth attending the conference, while at the same time raising awareness for the need of involving youth in HIV and AIDS policies and programs. The reception will be held on the last day of the Youth Pre-Conference, on August 2. It will provide an opportunity for 500 youth and adults to show their commitment to youth involvement, mingle, network, and enjoy a musical performance by renowned Mexican artist Julieta Venegas.

**Agentes de Cambio:** On behalf of the Mexico YouthForce, MTV Latinoamérica, GYCA, UNFPA, and Fundación Huésped developed a scholarship competition for young Latin American digital reporters, "Agentes de Cambio" (Agentes of Change) to win scholarships to attend the conference, Youth Pre-Conference, and a youth media workshop on July 30th. The Agentes will work with Latin American youth delegates to ensure that their voice and their issues are prominent within YouthForce activities and media coverage. The competition was announced with a 30 second television advertisement that aired in 22 Latin American countries and reached approximately 17 million households. 17 winners were chosen out of 350 applicants.

**Youth Pocketbook Guide:** The YouthForce is completing a condensed version of the Youth Pocketbook Guide to Navigating International AIDS Conferences. This short guide serves as both a tool kit and call to action, encouraging young people to raise their voices and fully participate in the 2008 International AIDS Conference. The pocketbook, which is being produced with the support of Plan International, will be available in English and Spanish.

**"AIDS in Focus" Photography Contest:** The Mexico YouthForce lets young people express what AIDS means to them and their community through photography, transcending language barriers and facilitating cross-cultural dialogue on AIDS issues. To learn more about the contest please go to <http://www.tigurl.org/aidsfocus>.

**Youth Orientation Initiative:** The YOI is an initiative to support young people in preparing and strategizing for effective and meaningful participation at the conference. It involves matching young people with previous IAC experience with young people who are less familiar with the conference. This initiative will assist young people in feeling comfortable and prepared to effectively navigate the sessions and get the most out of the conference

**Activities during the IAC, in collaboration with the AIDS2008 Youth Programme:**

**Advocacy and visibility campaign:** The Mexico YouthForce will implement an advocacy campaign during the conference to raise relevant youth HIV and AIDS issues during main conference sessions and other events. Young people will be trained to lobby key leaders for concrete commitments on youth issues, increased financial investments in youth sexual reproductive health, and the meaningful involvement of youth leaders in their work after the conference. The campaign's key messages were formulated through an international e-consultation with 125 young people engaged in the AIDS response from 46 different countries. These messages will be visible at the conference on t-shirts, posters, banners, postcards, and more.

**Youth-Adults Commitments Desk:** The Commitments Desk, housed at the Youth Pavilion in the Global Village, is an initiative where delegates can make time-bound commitments to prioritize youth issues and youth involvement in their research, funding, policies, and programs. In order to hold these delegates accountable, these commitments will be tracked after the conference by young people involved in the AIDS response in the countries where commitments are made. This initiative was successfully undertaken at the 2006 IAC in Toronto, when 102 out of 344 commitments to youth from 63 countries were honored.

**Media and communications campaign:** The Mexico YouthForce media team will hold two press conferences, one on Monday August 4<sup>th</sup> entitled "Setting the Agenda for Youth" and one on Thursday August 7<sup>th</sup> entitled "Uniting Against Stigma and Discrimination: A Youth Perspective." Through writing, blogging, podcasting, photography, and video, a team of youth journalists will bring youth issues to the forefront of the conference agenda and offer a youth perspective on the important events, announcements, and presentations through their reporting. The overall goal of the youth journalist team will be to provide excellent coverage of Mexico YouthForce activities, as well as the main conference, not only in the interest of increasing the exposure of youth issues at the conference and in the media, but to ensure that youth unable to physically attend the conference can remain updated on conference activities that are relevant to youth and HIV and AIDS.

**Youth Pavilion:** The Youth Pavilion is a dynamic exhibition and lounge area in the Global Village that will showcase young people's work on HIV and AIDS issues. The exhibits and sessions will demonstrate that young people are necessary in working towards solutions. In addition to serving as a youth advocacy hub, the youth pavilion will provide

space for presentations, art and media exhibits, meetings, dialogues, and workshops. It will feature a room for youth living with HIV to connect and mobilize, a youth meeting and networking room, a blogging computer station to document commitments to young people, an interactive art space graffiti wall, and more.

Youth-focused sessions: A wide range of youth-focused sessions will be offered throughout the pre- and main conference and within the Global Village. Many YouthForce members are leading and participating in these sessions, such as the two major Non Abstract-Driven Sessions on youth entitled "Reaching Millions: Youth, AIDS and the Digital Age" and " Addressing the Gap: Commitments, Funding, and Youth Engagement." In addition, the YouthForce is holding a Youth Leadership Forum, for youth leaders and key leaders in the global HIV community.

Youth Partnership Initiative: In partnership with the Mexico YouthForce, the World AIDS Campaign, with the support of UNFPA and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, will implement a Youth Partnership Initiative throughout the International AIDS Conference. The YPI will pair youth leaders with established leaders of a wide-range of constituencies, in order to support youth to develop practical leadership skills experientially, as well as for the constituencies to learn from youth leaders and develop partnerships with young people. Through a two-way learning process, the YPI will promote mutual understanding, facilitate networking, and enable a transfer of knowledge and skills between participants.

Youth orientation session: This session will be held the evening of Monday August 4th and will serve as an in-person orientation for young delegates who were unable to attend the Youth Pre-Conference. Themes will include: how to strategically choose which session to attend, how to network, advocacy 101, information about the YouthForce, key advocacy messages, etc. The session will also highlight key sessions for young people throughout the conference and will tie into the on-line discussion boards on the AIDS2008 website.

#### **Maintaining the Momentum:**

After the International AIDS Conference in Mexico, the coordinating committee will reconvene to share what they have learned and assess the impact of the various activities. Young people participating in AIDS2008 will be invited to join existing international youth networks coordinated by the YouthForce core partners. This will allow young people to stay in touch and continue networking with other youth involved in HIV and AIDS advocacy, and will enable YouthForce partners to continue to monitor the results of youth-adult partnerships and national and international commitments to youth made at the conference.

The YouthForce's achievements will be documented in a report and shared widely among the global health community at large. Lessons learned and best practices from this report can serve as a launching point for future efforts to engage young people in global and national strategic processes.

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