



ATHENA

ADVANCING GENDER EQUITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE GLOBAL RESPONSE TO HIV/AIDS

July 31, 2007

Report from the International Women's Summit

Dear friends:

Thank you to all of our members and partners who made the International Women's Summit a tremendous success! Thank you to the World YWCA and to ICW for convening such an historic event. Thank you to Musimbi Kanyoro for her extraordinary leadership. Thank you to all of the World YWCA staff, especially Sophie Dilmitis and Clarissa Balan, for being the wizards behind the scenes to make such a feat possible. Thank you to all of the amazing women who participated – giving of their expertise, sharing their energy, and traveling great distances to make the Summit the remarkable gathering that it was. Thank you to friends and colleagues, old and new, who brought their enthusiasm, wisdom, and vision to the Women's Networking Zone as organizers, presenters, participants, and volunteers to build the momentum of this vehicle and ensure its success. It was a privilege to collaborate with local leaders NEPHAK and WOFAK on the Positive Women's Town Hall Forum. Thank you to all of the partners, friends, and colleagues who made the Town Hall the phenomenal forum that it was.

Congratulations! Congratulations to the World YWCA and ICW on being the first to convene a global meeting on women, HIV, and leadership. Congratulations to ATHENA members Dawn Averitt Bridge, Violeta Ross, and Alice Welbourn – and friends Irina Borushek, Anita Isaacs, and Kousalya Periasamy – for their recognition as women leading change in their communities. Congratulations to Alice Welbourn and all the drafters of the Call to Action. It is a powerful tool for us all to carry forward!

As individuals, organizations, and as a Network, many of us participated in shaping this historic opportunity for the global community of advocates for women's rights and leadership in HIV and AIDS. ATHENA participated in an advisory capacity to the development of the Call to Action – and consulted on the formation of the Summit. I had the privilege, along with other ATHENA members, of serving on the selection committee for the Women Leading Change Awards. ATHENA organizational members Blueprint for Action on Women and HIV, Center for Health and Gender Equity, Center for Reproductive Rights, Human Rights Watch, ICW, Ibis Reproductive Health, Ipas, Voices of Positive Women, Thai Women and AIDS Task Force, The Living Together Project, The Well Project, and WORLD all led workshops or convened discussions at the Summit. Louise Binder, Dawn Averitt Bridge, Lynde Francis, Jennifer Gatsi, Shari Margolese, Inviolata Mmbwavi, Lydia Mungherera, MariJo Vazquez, and Alice Welbourn delivered provocative and powerful addresses. Anne-christine d'Adesky, Maria de Bruyn, Peg Frank, Beri Hull, Johanna Kehler, Luisa Orza and Betsi Pendry initiated important dialogue – and worked behind the scenes.

ATHENA's activities were enriched by the materials and resources provided by the AIDS Legal Network, AVAC, CATIE, CHANGE, Center for Reproductive Rights, ICW, Ipas, Center for Women's Global Leadership, Global AIDS Alliance, Stepping Stones, The Living Together Project, Voices of Positive Women, Women Won't Wait, World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action, and World Pulse. The Body Map Gallery in the Women's Networking Zone drew the crowds as did the beautiful beadwork of the Mama's Club. I was pleased to see such a lively forum for spontaneous strategizing, shared expertise, information exchange, and global networking. Thank you again to all of our volunteers – and to all of the co-conveners of the WNZ!

Encapsulating the week with a few snapshots is a near impossible task however I hope that this sampling of highlights will provide those of you who were not in Nairobi with a glimpse of the richness, diversity, and promise that the four days contained.

- MariJo Vazquez delivered a riveting opening to the Summit on behalf of ICW during which she spoke of sexual pleasure, the harmful effects of patriarchal systems, and the advancement of women's rights as central to a successful response to HIV and AIDS. MariJo spoke directly and with passion about taboo topics and critical gaps – and did so with the President of Kenya by her side.
- The Positive Women's Town Hall Forum on Reproductive and Sexual Rights circled around challenges from the right to safe, healthy motherhood for positive women to freedom from violence, marital rape, and harmful policies. Beatrice Were led a riveting call for government accountability – and Inviolata Mmbwavi led a similar call for individual accountability.
- Women's Networking Zone happenings:
 - Maria de Bruyn of Ipas engaged Musimbi Kanyoro, Secretary General of the World YWCA, in how we support religious leaders to tackle contentious issues. Serra Sippel of CHANGE led a policy discussion around and a demonstration of the female condom. Johanna Kehler of the AIDS Legal Network, Dawn Averitt Bridge of the Well Project, and Lydia Mungherera of the Mama's Club discussed ways in which current testing policy is placing a disproportionate burden on women. Emily Bass of AVAC and Anne-christine d'Adesky of WE-ACTX led a debate around the implications of male circumcision trials for women. Louise Binder of the Blueprint Coalition brought micro-credit strategies and Susana Fried brought the Women Won't Wait campaign's efforts to engage the Universal Access Project.
 - Claire Thiboutot, founder of STELLA, led a discussion around building bridges between sex workers and women with other lived experiences. The discussion mapped the parameters of current efforts to address violence against women and HIV – and explored how a sex worker rights agenda can be integral to these initiatives. The challenge Claire presented was this – how do we advance the rights of HIV positive women and of sex workers

simultaneously? Claire presented the conundrum of the “whore stigma” and a powerful, important dialogue with Dorothy Onyango, Co-Chair of ICW, ensued.

- As ATHENA member Susana Fried commented, “The Women’s Networking Zone at the IWS provided a welcome space that was both inside and outside the summit itself. The WNZ felt like a space of our own.”
- The ATHENA networking dinner included women leaders from around the world – and from a diversity of sectors. Sex worker rights advocates sat beside reproductive and sexual health advocates who sat beside policy analysts shaping national AIDS plans. ICW members from around the world joined with Mama’s Club members from Uganda and human rights advocates from South Africa. We enjoyed an evening building new bridges between journalists and researchers, between funders and grassroots leaders, and between the global North and the global South. Sitting around two tables, we represented some of the most exciting promise and most outstanding leadership in the global response to HIV and AIDS today.
- All of our programming and all of our discussions highlighted distinct challenges and tensions for us to continue to grapple with in our work. As more and more women are recognized as leading change and as women’s leadership is increasingly recognized as essential to the global response, how many women sit at decision-making tables in national instruments, academic research centers, and funding circles? As more and more of us rely on the internet and global gatherings to strategize and collaborate, what happens to the majority of infected and affected women and communities who are not connected? As we embrace a rigorous and robust human rights framework for our work, how do we address old and new policy trends that do not do the same?

As always, it is a privilege to work with each of you – and to see the reach and impact we have when we work together. Thank you.

With sincere respect and best wishes –

Tyler

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