

**SPEECH BY THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR
COMMONWEALTH YOUTH PROGRAMME
DANCE FOR LIFE
29TH NOVEMBER 2008**

Distinguished ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great pleasure to be here at Zambia's first Dance4Life event with so many partners wishing to build a positive future for and with Africa's youths.

I am indeed very happy to join in the celebrations of the hundreds of young people who have been working very hard to ensure that we push back the HIV/AIDS scourge in Zambia.

As you may all know, although people from all walks of life are affected, AIDS is hitting hard at the most vulnerable sections of our society, its striking at the heart of the most productive members of society. It is the youth.

However, youth-led development agencies work to empower and educate young people thru many activities, one of which we are all gathered for here - The dance4life events that aim at educating young people about HIV and AIDS and supporting them to be active global citizens.

Such celebrations therefore give us an opportunity to take stock of our challenges and future strategies.

It is, therefore, my conviction that this occasion provides an opportunity for each and every pupil here present to reflect on past experiences, the present situation and the future with a view to push back HIV and AIDS.

Allow me to briefly share some information on Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) and why we attach such great importance to young people.

The Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) is an intergovernmental youth and development agency working primarily with member governments' ministries and departments of youth .The CYP works to engage and empower young people between 15-29years, to enhance their contribution to development.

Our strategic areas of work are Youth Enterprise Development, Youth Participation, Youth Networks and Governance and Youth Work Education and Training. The CYP contributes to the promotion of youth development by supporting policy and programme development and implementation. Through our programmes we put in a lot emphasis on combating HIV/AIDS and ensuring healthy lifestyles among young people. The CYP has numerous frameworks put in place to support this. The notable one is the commonwealth Plan Action for Youth Empowerment, (PAYE) 2007-2015.

Am honored to tell you that CYP is here because of the partnership that it has entered into with SPW to support HIV/AIDS prevention initiatives especially the YAPL-SHEP, a School Health Educational Programme over the past three and half years.

CYP on it's own embarked on the (YAPL) The Young Ambassadors of Positive Living Programme after being faced with the mounting challenge of HIV/AIDS during the late 80's and early 90s, especially with its ramification on the youthful and productive population of member countries in the Region.

CYP under the YAPL has since then been identifying young people (aged 15-29) living with the HIV virus, build their capacity as advocates for behavior change and empowers them to spread the message through targeted communication strategies and self (positive living). This programme has been successfully replicated in the 21 Commonwealth countries.

As we gather here to celebrate the works of young people in combating HIV/AIDS in Zambia, I therefore call on all governments' ministries and departments of youth and stakeholders in youth development and young people themselves to support programmes aiming at youth development. Together, let us ensure that HIV rates are reduced and youth have access to information, education and services necessary to develop life skills for reducing vulnerability to HIV. Let us "inspire, mobilize and unite young people to push back HIV and AIDS"

Goal 6 of the 8 MDGs is that of combating HIV and AIDS. It's a great honor and privilege to tell you that CYP is committed to halting and reversing the spread of HIV.

I thank all the government ministries, departments of youth, NGOs, various stakeholders and indeed young people for their continuous contributions to the fight against HIV/AIDS.