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WHO PRESS

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WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION LAUNCHES PUBLIC INFORMATION EFFORT TO INCREASE GLOBAL AWARENESS OF AIDS

The World Health Organization (WHO) today launched its global public information campaign with the message "AIDS. A worldwide effort will stop it" and revealed a new symbol to increase global awareness of AIDS. Dr Halfdan Mahler, Director-General of WHO, was presented with the new symbol for AIDS at a press conference held at WHO headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.

"AIDS is a global epidemic that demands a global attack", says Dr Jonathan Mann, Director of the WHO Special Programme on AIDS. "WHO's global strategy for AIDS control is to stop the spread of AIDS worldwide by striking every way the virus spreads, in every country, using every scientific and educational tool available".

"AIDS has created a worldwide emergency. The disease has assumed pandemic proportions affecting every continent of the world. A major priority for this campaign is to increase awareness that AIDS threatens all countries".

Since AIDS was first identified in 1981, the number of countries reporting cases of AIDS has risen dramatically. As of 27 May 1987, 51 069 AIDS cases had been reported to WHO from 112 countries. The number of reported cases, however, represents only a percentage of the total cases to date which are estimated to be in excess of 100 000.

The campaign is part of an overall strategy to promote individual actions which will prevent the spread of the AIDS virus. "But to change human behaviour, we first have to change people's attitudes and focus their attention on what they, personally, can do", says Dr Mann. Dr Mann said WHO chose a message that "simultaneously communicates the severity of the AIDS threat and that a global strategy can control it".

At the press conference, internationally known graphic designer Milton Glaser revealed the dramatic symbol for AIDS. In creating the symbol, two red hearts that converge in a blue fright mask, Mr Glaser said he was seeking an image with the "power to persist in the memory".

The message and symbol are the central images of a poster Mr Glaser created for the Special Programme on AIDS; according to Dr Mann, the poster will be the first in a series of posters WHO will commission from artists throughout the world.

A brochure describing the WHO global strategy and giving the facts on how the AIDS virus is and is not spread will first be available at the 3rd International Conference on AIDS being held in Washington next week.

"AIDS thrives not only in the body, but on human ignorance, fear and resistance to change", says Dr Mann. "Public awareness campaigns like ours and those we support in many countries are the start in a long-term process of overcoming these obstacles".

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