

PRESS RELEASE

‘Life Ball’ commemorates 30 years of AIDS

Charity event spotlights HIV epidemics in Eastern Europe and Central Asia

VIENNA, 23 May 2011—Celebrities and influential leaders in the global AIDS response gathered at Vienna’s City Hall on 21 May for the 2011 Life Ball, Europe’s largest annual AIDS charity event. This year’s Life Ball commemorated 30 years of AIDS and focused on the rapidly growing HIV epidemics in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

“The Life Ball is not only about celebrating life, but also about creating a social movement to stop stigma and discrimination,” said Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS, speaking at a press conference on 21 May. “Gery (Keszler) and AIDS LIFE are a voice and force of change in this movement,” he added.

Mr Sidibé was joined at the press conference by Gery Keszler, co-founder and Chairman of AIDS LIFE, a non-profit organization that organizes the Life Ball. Other speakers included singer Janet Jackson representing amfAR, clothing designers Dean and Dan Caten of Dsquared2, and Hollywood actress Brooke Shields.

Before the opening ceremony of Life Ball, a number of eminent guests attended the AIDS Solidarity Gala, a fundraising dinner co-hosted by UNAIDS and AIDS LIFE under the patronage of the President of the Republic of Austria, Heinz Fischer. Proceeds from the event will be used, in part, to support UNAIDS programmes in the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

Over the past decade, the number of people living with HIV in Eastern Europe and Central Asia nearly tripled—from an estimated 530 000 in 2000 to 1.4 million in 2009. The Russian Federation and Ukraine together account for nearly 90% of newly reported HIV infections in the region. Though the epidemics in Eastern Europe and Central Asia are mainly concentrated among people who inject drugs, sex workers and men who have sex with men, these populations have limited access to HIV services.

At the Life Ball opening ceremony, 30 international personalities presented milestones in the epidemic’s 30-year history. The UNAIDS Executive Director highlighted the founding of UNAIDS in 1996 and the “glimmer of hope” that same year when combination antiretroviral therapy proved effective in keeping people living with HIV alive.

Former United States President Bill Clinton noted in his remarks that substantial price reductions in antiretroviral medicines since the year 2002 had greatly expanded access to treatment for millions of people. However, he said, a major treatment gap remains: “Ten million people in poor countries still need to be on (antiretroviral) medicines. If you want to cut the infection rate, if you want to cut the death rate, we have to finish the job.”

Every year, the Life Ball recognizes the work and dedication of pioneers in the AIDS response through the “Crystal of Hope” award. This year’s award of 100 000 EUR was presented to Anya Sarang, President of the Andrey Rylkov Foundation for Health and Social Justice, a non-governmental organization based in the Russian Federation that advocates for the human rights of people who use drugs.

[UNAIDS’ vision: Zero new HIV infections. Zero discrimination. Zero AIDS-related deaths.](#)

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UNAIDS

UNAIDS, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, is an innovative United Nations partnership that leads and inspires the world in achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. Learn more at unaids.org.