

Berne (Switzerland) – 6 June 2011

Putting a stamp on AIDS

Nearly 3 million individual stamps will circulate within and across borders this year to draw attention to 30 years of the AIDS epidemic and the importance of continuing to prevent new HIV infections. Since the start of the epidemic, 60 million people have become infected with HIV and nearly 30 million people have died of AIDS-related causes.

At least 20 Posts around the world have joined an initiative to issue stamps and other philatelic products to commemorate the landmark year. Participating Posts include: Belarus, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Croatia Post (Mostar), Fiji, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Luxembourg, New Caledonia, Malawi, Moldova, Pakistan, Slovakia, Romania, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine and Uruguay. The United Nations Postal Administration (UNPA) is also issuing three stamps that will be sold in UN Offices in New York, Geneva and Vienna. For more information, visit the display at the UNPA counter in the General Assembly building in New York.

“Stamps – these formidable mini works of art – are noble ambassadors that leave important messages in the hands of all who receive mail,” said Edouard Dayan, director general of the United Nations specialized agency for postal services. “The Universal Postal Union is proud that so many Posts have responded to our call to raise awareness of critical issues like HIV. Once again, this initiative goes to show the incredible outreach value of postal services worldwide.”

Many stamps are being issued in June to coincide with the 2011 High Level Meeting on AIDS, taking place at the United Nations in New York from 8-10 June. The meeting will provide a platform for UN member states and partners to review progress and chart the future course of the global AIDS response.

“This is an excellent and important initiative to get people around the world talking about AIDS,” said Michel Sidibé, executive director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). “One of the greatest barriers in the AIDS response is the stigma and discrimination surrounding the disease. By initiating dialogue around HIV, these little stamps will play a big role in helping to break down some of those barriers.”

While most Posts have designed their own stamps, others, like Ukrposhta, Ukraine’s national postal service, have launched a national competition inviting artists to propose a stamp design on the theme of 30 years of AIDS. Ukraine’s winning stamp will be issued on World AIDS Day, December 1, 2011.

Global campaign

The philatelic initiative is part of the global HIV-campaign launched in 2009 by the Universal Postal Union, UNAIDS, the International Labour Organization and UNI Global. The campaign relies on the global postal network's vast outreach to draw attention to the importance of HIV prevention.

More than 23,000 post offices around the world have carried out awareness campaigns using posters, postcards, a website (www.unaids.org/preventHIV) and public events to inform people about HIV. The campaigns have potentially reached millions of people. In Cameroon alone, the Post estimates that campaign materials are viewed daily by 36,000 people.

This is the first time that Posts worldwide have made a concerted effort to draw attention to AIDS, but philately has been raising awareness about the disease for years. A quick survey of the UPU's World Numbering System (www.wnsstamps.ch) reveals that more than 60 different AIDS themed stamps have been issued since 2002, when the database was created.

To view a slideshow of AIDS stamps through the years, please go to: www.upu.int/en/aids_stamps

About the UPU

Created in 1874, the UPU, based in Berne (Switzerland), is an intergovernmental organization and the primary forum for cooperation between governments, Posts and other stakeholders of the worldwide postal sector. In addition to maintaining a genuinely universal network that provides modern products and services, it establishes the rules for international mail exchanges among its 191 members and makes recommendations to stimulate mail volume growth and to improve the quality of service for customers. Some 5.5 million employees process and deliver 433 billion domestic letter-post items annually, as well as some 5.5 billion international items and over 6 billion parcels. Many postal services also offer expedited mail, financial and electronic services. About 660,000 postal establishments make the postal network the largest physical distribution network in the world. The UPU celebrated 60 years as a specialized agency of the United Nations in 2008. Learn more at: www.upu.int

About 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

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