



Remember World Aids Day 2010

We talk to Stefan Hippler, founder of HOPE, a non-profit-organisation that focuses on HIV/AIDS

"The fight against AIDS constitutes one of the key challenges for the further development of the country", says Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi in a November issue of Business Day. This is not really surprising especially considering the total number of people infected with the AIDS virus. According to official figures over ten percent of the 49 million South Africans have AIDS, although researchers believe that it may even be 20 percent. With the inauguration of President Jacob Zuma in May 2009, South Africa has been making significant efforts to combat the spread of the immunodeficiency disease.

Same as every year it's World AIDS Day on the first of December. In 2010 we talk to Stefan Hippler, who has been dealing with the issue of HIV/AIDS on a daily basis for over 10 years now.

CTMag: What is HOPE planning for World AIDS Day 2010?

Stefan: Personally, I feel ambivalent towards the World AIDS Day: on the one hand, it is necessary to highlight the continuing problem, on the other hand, every day is World AIDS Day for me. HOPE Cape Town will participate with its colleagues in the activities in township hospitals. We support already-planned actions.

CTMag: South Africa and AIDS – this is synonymous in the media. Does AIDS automatically 'belong' to South Africa? How do you assess the current situation in the country?

Stefan: Right now it automatically belongs to South Africa, with the numbers we are still in the World Cup group. Although much has improved, there is still a long way to go, too much "red tape". And if everyone would truly claim their treatment, then the health care system would collapse. So, we are still far from being over the hill.

CTMag: A few weeks ago, I read: " The total number of people living with HIV in South Africa increased from 4.1 million in 2001 (9.4% of total population) to 5.24 million in 2010 (10.5%)." (Statistics South Africa, Mid-year population estimates 2010) . What is the root of the problem?

Stefan: There is definitely some fatigue in the minds of South Africans. This is because often unprofessional teachers dealt with the topic in class so people remain uneducated. Teachers, who really wanted to say nothing about it and then didn't do their job properly. Among young people, the subject is already enshrined more, but you still have to bring that knowledge from the head to the heart and thus it slides on the practical level.

CTMag: Does HIV/AIDS in South Africa rather concern the poor?

Stefan: Not only in South Africa does it rather concern the poor – the ones who are poor have a better chance to be infected and die. That is a fact.

CTMag: What can I do as a non-affected person?

Stefan: This is a difficult question because I do not think there is a 'non-affected' person in South Africa - everyone is somehow affected when he opens his eyes, directly or indirectly. And to respond, to help de-stigmatize, that is the task of all.

CTMag: What's going on with the government in South Africa?

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