



AIDS 2014 Opening Addresses (Embargoed 19:00, 20/7/14)

Ayu Oktariani

Ms. Oktariani is on the board of the Indonesian Positive Woman's Network and focal point for YouthLEAD and women Living with HIV in Indonesia.

Speech

I am here today to welcome you to our region on behalf of the community of people living with and affected by HIV. I am a young women living with HIV. I was born and grow up in Indonesia, a country that is rich in cultural and natural wealth. In my home, many barriers stop young people's voices from being heard.

When I was a teenager, I never talked about my body - to my family or with my teachers at school. I had nobody to ask questions about the problems that I faced. I had to work everything out about teenage life alone.

I have been living with HIV for 5 years. I am HIV-positive because of lack of information. What happened to me is common throughout our region and the world. I come from the most populous Muslim country, but our situation is not unique. I am surrounded by peers from other countries - Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Seikhs, atheists, and we all faced the same problem. Many of us got HIV because we did not have the means to protect ourselves.

Living with HIV is not so easy. When I wanted to test for HIV, they said I must be accompanied by a parent. In fact I was afraid. I didn't want my parents to know. I felt like I had no right over my body.

And my Parents and my society wanted to distance themselves from me.

Since living with HIV, I have tremendous responsibilities. Raising my daughter alone, I must keep healthy and serve as father and mother for her, provide guidance for my child, and work to earn money to support her.

Disclosing myself as a young woman living with HIV is constantly challenging. It's not only about the HIV, but about people's judgment of my sexual behaviour. Where are my friends who do not consider me as different?

Health workers ask a thousand questions: "Why are you infected with HIV so young?". When I wanted to do a Pap Smear test, I was told I could not, because I'm not married, even though I was sexually active with my partner.



HIV cannot be solved by science alone. Because of the stigma of HIV, we need to include people living with HIV in the response. We know that women diagnosed as living with HIV during pregnancy and provided with ARVs are five times more likely to be lost to follow up than other women. Men continue to deny they bring HIV into the family, until they become sick, and all the family's financial resources are poured into his health care. This is wrong.

ARVs alone cannot stop new HIV infections. Scientists need to work with those of us who understand why the science failed us. We need to be engaged in HIV education programs in schools, and in clinics where people are diagnosed, so they do not live for years in shame and denial.

Many organizations that work hard at national, regional and Global level need to recognize the need to involve us in the response to HIV. I'm asking all young people living with HIV and those who care about us, to join hands and work together to make a better world where young people get the information they need and all people living with HIV are treated with respect. Welcome to AIDS 2014.

ENDS

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