

17. INTERNATIONAL

DAY OF ACTION REPORT

Harvard students confronted Finance Minister Trevor Manuel on the issue of AIDS treatment and prevention when he spoke there in on 16 April.

When Manuel arrived at Harvard's Ames Courtroom to give his speech, he was greeted by a group of students and activists, 'some in HIV positive t-shirts and some in suits', passing out leaflets and carrying signs saying 'Pro-ANC, Anti-AIDS Denialism', 'Prevention and Treatment for AIDS in Africa' and demanding universal access to anti-retrovirals in South Africa. After the speech, according to our report, '70% of questions from the floor were on anti-retrovirals'. One questioner requested audience members in support of demands for ARVs for poor South Africans to rise, and 'almost the entire room rose to their feet'. According to one present, 'This did something visible to shift the power balance from the man in the suit behind the podium'. She continued, 'He simply could not get away from the question', which was also pursued by students, activists, and other invited guests at the reception. (Pictures to come.)

Activists in London demonstrated in front of the SA High Commission in Trafalgar Square on 24 April, delivering 25 pairs of shoes every hour, and distributing materials about AIDS in Southern Africa and the work of TAC.

A delegation including 3 people living with AIDS (2 from South Africa), the Deputy chairperson of the Stop AIDS Campaign, and a representative from the UK Consortium on AIDS and International Development met with the Deputy High Commissioner to stress the need for the SA government to sign and implement the HIV/AIDS Treatment Plan and to identify areas of collaboration between the SA High Commission and UK NGOs in advocating for Treatment Action. The Deputy High Commissioner did not respond directly but rather promised to consult the Department of Home Affairs and come back with a written response. Member of Parliament Caroline Spelman of the Shadow International Development Secretary, joined the demonstration and released a statement in support of its demands.

At Boston's Northeastern University School of law, thirty students and faculty attended a teach-in on HIV/AIDS in South Africa.

Presentations focused on intellectual property barriers that affect access to medicines, how globalization and neo-liberal economic policies have intensified the pandemic, HIV/AIDS and gender, and TAC's history of activism. All present signed letters to SA officials as well as and separate letters to Coca-Cola and the U.S. Trade

Representative, demanding action to ease access to ARVs in poor countries.

In Milan, activists from AIDS NGOs Lila Cedius, Azione Aiuto and Mani Tese laid 600



pairs of shoes on the Piazza Duca D'Aosta on the 24th. They also held a well-attended press release. We are awaiting press coverage as well as reports on a demonstration scheduled for the following day.

In Bangkok, representatives of the Thai Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (TNP+) delivered a letter endorsed by 6 NGOs to SA Ambassador.



In Paris, ACT UP demonstrated at the SA Embassy, carrying posters of Manto Tshabalala-Msimang and Alec Erwin with the legend 'AIDS War Criminals'



and staging a 'die-in'. The SA Ambassador refused requests for a meeting and called in a substantial police presence. ACT UP Paris issued a press release calling for "dramatic action to end the AIDS crisis in South Africa" on the part of the SA government. French news service PANA Press quoted ACT-UP member Khalil Elouardighi as saying, 'We cannot remain indifferent to the behaviour of the South African leadership that openly prevents AIDS patients from having access to the treatment they need'.

Demonstrators confronted by police at SA Embassy in Paris



“Die-in” at the Paris SA Embassy Police presence at Paris demonstration. For more info see <http://www.actupparis.org/article1099.html>.



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Organizers of the second Forum on AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Diseases in Latin America and the Caribbean report that a letter in support of TAC's demands and its campaign of civil disobedience, signed by 350 delegates, was faxed to every South African Embassy in Latin America.

In Tokyo, 600 paper cranes were delivered to the South African Embassy. Members of the Africa Japan Forum, accompanied by Etsuko Kawada, a member of the Japanese House of Representative visited the South African Embassy on 22 April.

Along with the cranes they submitted a letter, signed by more than 75 members of Japanese civil society as well as two members of the House of Representatives, urging the South African government 'to make an irreversible and unequivocal commitment to a public sector ARV programme, and to return to the negotiations at NEDLAC and make a commitment to signing a Framework Agreement on National HIV/AIDS Prevention and Treatment Plan'. These were received by Councillor Mahlatse Mminele, who met with the activists for two hours. Ms. Kawada described the experience of her son, a person living with AIDS who experienced a dramatic recovery after taking ARV's, and urged South African government to introduce ARV treatment to its public health system. She added, 'politics is for saving people's



lives'. Councillor Mminele responded that 'In South Africa, HIV/AIDS is not a mere "problem". We have to define it as a "crisis". However, the coordinator of the Africa Japan Forum described being 'disappointed because there were no clear and rational explanation ... why the South African government hasn't provided ARV treatment publicly'. He reports that 'through the dialogue, we gained hope that we can continue our discussion' with Councillor Mminele. Another meeting is scheduled for 14 May, this time with the South African Ambassador in Tokyo.

lives'.

Representatives of Africa Japan Forum with paper cranes for the Embassy

In Finland, a letter signed by 62 international students was handed over to SA Ambassador Franki Verwey in Helsinki.

Signatories came from 14 countries, including South Africa, Australia, Finland, Canada, U.S.A, Germany, France, Mexico, Ecuador, China, Taiwan, Bahamas, Austria and Japan.

In Belgium, TAC representative Denis Matwa attended a meeting between pro-treatment organisations ITAC and the Stop Aids Alliance and members of the European Commission, as well as a meeting of the European Union Parliament.

A press conference was held on 24 April, and a letter was handed over to the South African Embassy.

Denis Matwa speaks at the press conference in Brussels.



Patrick Reyntiens (Sensoa) reads his statement.

The letter was supported by 50 signatures, about 10 from MPs from all Belgian parties, 10 from medical institutions, and 30 from organisations involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS and in international cooperation.

Alex Parisel reports that the conference was attended by the representative of the Embassy responsible for health matters, Mr. Kawa Somgqeza. Questioned by Denis Matwa about the Government's position, Somgqeza answered that the issue was not denial but lack of resources. Confronted

with the refusal of the Government to accept large donations and to refuse to sign the Global Fund proposals, Somgqeza remained silent but promised a formal response. Patrick Reyntiens of Sensoa, HIV+ for 18 years, read a statement in which he commented, 'I myself can testify that anti-retroviral therapy can add to the quality of life of people living with HIV', and called on the South African government to provide a comprehensive treatment and prevention plan for HIV/AIDS.

The meeting in Parliament, which occurred on 23 April, had been organized by STOP AIDS NOW campaign supported by MEP Max Van Den Berg. Denis Matwa assisted at several presentations promoting access to treatment (from ITAC, MSF, etc). The representatives from the Commission (from DGDEV and AIDCO) reacted with scepticism, arguing from a cost-effective point of view and from a "patient centred approach" opposed to a specific "disease approach".

Report from Denis Matwa, as well as more photos, to come.

The Washington Post reported that about 200 activists marched on the South African Embassy in Washington DC on 24 April.

They sang the tunes of anti-apartheid songs, with updated lyrics demanding access to AIDS treatment, and dumped a 4-foot high pile of 600 shoes, garlanded with lilies, in front of the SA Embassy.. Demonstrators came from ACT UP New York, ACT UP Philadelphia, Health GAP, Africa Action, African Services Committee, Student Global AIDS Campaign, and many community organizations in Philadelphia and New York like Stand Up Harlem and Stop and Surrender. According to Asia Russell of ACT UP Philadelphia, buses transporting people to the action from New York and Philadelphia were 'overflowing'.

South African Ambassador Thandabantu Nhlapo reads a statement.



Demonstrators deliver shoes to the SA Embassy in Washington

Activists met with the Nhlapo during the day. Sharonann Lynch of Health GAP provides the following report: 'A few of us went inside for a meeting with the acting ambassador and four other Embassy Attaché staff. They were willing to listen, asked a lot of questions, and made no commitments of any sort. They seemed to have little specific information, although they knew there was some sort of controversy.

'We learned that several of the embassy staff had lost multiple family members to AIDS. The Ambassador did not seem to be aware that SA was holding up implementation of a Global Fund grant that would provide treatment to thousands in KZN. A number of the officials' statements seemed to indicate that they thought that SA's plans were moving in the right direction. They also did not know that GFATM grants are meant to be sustainable and to pay for recurrent expenses.

'Finally, when they raised the usual questions of sustainability and capacity, our team mentioned that Mozambique had already launched a plan to provide treatment to tens of thousands of people. Capacity was no longer mentioned. The groups discussed multi-country compulsory licensing, billion dollar applications to the Global Fund, production of generic drugs for export to other SADC member states. We said we support TAC's modest demands for implementation of a plan to provide AIDS treatment to all in need, and that the government had already taken far too long'.

To view the Washington Post article, go to <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A35426-2003Apr24.html>.

In the Netherlands, activists marched to South African Embassy, delivering 600 red tulips and staging a "die-in".

They also presented the embassy with a petition. Organisers included STOP AIDS NOW!, Aids Fonds, Hiv Vereniging Nederland, HIVOS, ICCO, Global Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS, PharmAccess International, and Positive Africans Mutual Aid.

"Die-in" at the South African embassy



Marching to the embassy



For more information, see <http://www.stopaidsn.nl/nieuws/nieuws11.html>.

Activists from Solidarity in Action Against HIV Infection in India (SAATHI) sent 600 dolls with black HIV/AIDS ribbons tied around their necks, along with letters demanding the implementation of a comprehensive treatment and prevention plan for HIV/AIDS, to the South African Embassy in New Delhi.

In Los Angeles, a group of about 40 activists organized by Artists in Support of a New South Africa and the Black AIDS Institute, held a vigil in front of the South African Consulate on Monday, 28 April.

The vigil was held over 600 pairs sneakers, loafers, baby and children's shoes, and worker boots (see picture). Prominent civil rights activist Reverend Jim Lawson spoke to the crowd, which included a number of politically active actors as well as religious and academic leaders of the Los Angeles area. After the action,



the shoes were donated to the Minority AIDS Project, a nonprofit that provides services to nearly 1,000 people, predominantly African Americans and people of color, living with HIV/AIDS in Los Angeles. The Consulate responded simply with a formal acknowledgement.

Activists in Copenhagen have made repeated requests for a meeting with the South African Ambassador there.

The Ambassador has left the country, to return on 15 May; activists are pressing for a meeting then.

We are awaiting detailed reports of actions and meetings in Accra, Nairobi, and Lagos.

In addition to the statements and petitions mentioned above, letters came from individuals and organizations all over the world, including Belgium's State Secretary for Development and Cooperation (to SA Ambassador), Journalists Against AIDS (Lagos, Nigeria), Kenya Coalition for Access to Essential Medicines (Nairobi, Kenya), Northeastern University School of Law Student Global AIDS Campaign (Boston, USA), Postive Women Inc. (Victoria, Australia), Arusha Living Positively with HIV/AIDS along with more than Tanzanian 80 organisations (Arusha, Tanzania), LILA Cedius and 14 other Italian and international NGOs (Milan, Italy), Condoms4Life (Washington DC, USA), Christian World Service (Christchurch, New Zealand), Ghana AIDS Treatment Action Group (Accra, Ghana), Southern Africa Contact and four other Danish NGOs (Copenhagen, Denmark), and Health GAP and 6 other American NGOs.