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Press Release: Global Youth Coalition on HIV/AIDS launches Living Positively; an international community of young people living with HIV

Contacts: Marco Gomes, marco@youthaidscoalition.org or Joya Banerjee, joya@youthaidscoalition.org, 1-212-661-6111

"The day I found out my status was one of the toughest days of my life. However, my family and friends were very supportive and I am now doing the things I have always wanted to do, living a much healthier life and looking after my body. Being positive has changed me into the person I am proud of," says 26 year-old Marco from Canada, reflecting on the last four years of his life living positively.

Members of the Global Youth Coalition on HIV/AIDS (GYCA) who are living positively have come together to create a resource for their peers that will increase the participation of Young People Living With HIV/AIDS (YPLWH) in decision-making that affects their lives.

Today, 6,000 young people will be infected with HIV, most of them young women. Moreover, 1/3 of over 40 million people living with HIV and AIDS are under 25 years old, and the majority do not know their HIV status. Young leaders living with HIV are too often marginalized and left out of important interventions mitigating the physical, psycho-social, and economic impact of HIV/AIDS. Despite the debilitating effects of HIV and AIDS, YPLWH are taking action in their communities to prevent the spread of the virus and to address the devastating consequences of the pandemic. Evidence shows that young people play a crucial role in changing the risk behaviors of their peers and at shaping a better future for themselves, others living with HIV, and their families.

The *Living Positively* E-Group is a space for YPLWH and service providers to share ideas, experiences, and best practices. Members can share information on upcoming events, make suggestions for the development of *Living Positively*, and offer solutions toward the greater involvement of YPLWH. Exceptional young leaders living with HIV are profiled on the *Living Positively* website, and they have begun to compile resources that will provide support to other YPLWH and inform them about their disease, their rights, ways of dealing with disclosure, stigma and discrimination, psychosocial issues, prevention for and with positives, and access to services.

Living Positively is an outcome of the World Health Organization and UNICEF Global Consultation on Strengthening the Health Sector Contribution to Care, Support, Treatment and Prevention for YLWHA, Blantyre, Malawi, November, 2006. YPLWH were invited to work with health care providers and advocates to synthesize the physical and psychosocial needs for care, support, treatment and prevention for YPLWH; to explore ways to increase access, maintenance and adherence; and to develop consensus on key elements of care, support, treatment and prevention for YPLWH, including recommendations for linkages between the health sector and other sectors that will enhance the delivery and effectiveness of services, and the involvement of young people. The background papers and the meeting report will be available on the site shortly.

To subscribe to the *Living Positively* e-group, please send a blank email to livingpositively-subscribe@groups.takingitglobal.org

We hope that you will join us to help develop the *Living Positively* community and to support the meaningful participation of YPLWH in HIV/AIDS interventions!
<http://www.youthaidscoalition.org/living.html>

GYCA is a youth-led, UNAIDS and UNFPA-supported alliance of 2700 young leaders and adult allies working in over 100 countries worldwide. Please visit <http://www.youthaidscoalition.org> for more information or to join the Coalition.