



**Press Release: Living Positively and Hopes Voice International Merger**  
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**NEW YORK, NY – July 16, 2008** - Hope's Voice International (HVI) and the Living Positively network housed by the Global Youth Coalition on HIV/AIDS (GYCA) have joined forces to form a vibrant, active, and progressive global network of young people living with HIV (YPLHIV).

There are currently over 5.4 million young people living with HIV worldwide. Whether infected at birth or during adolescence, YPLHIV have specific needs that differ from positive children and adults that must be researched, advocated for, and addressed through funding, programs and evidence-based policies. Moreover, for programs and policies dealing with issues that YPLHIV face to be truly relevant and successful, they must provide leadership opportunities to YPLHIV in the intervention's design, implementation and evaluation. While many community-level, national, and regional networks exist for people living with HIV in general, networks specifically for *young people* living with HIV that exist at the regional or national levels face difficulties with human resources and funding. Currently there is no active global network that supports young people living with HIV, uses mass media to fight stigma and discrimination, an online social network to dialogue and mobilize, and provides them with leadership training and opportunities.

Living Positively, a network of 81 YPLHIV from 33 countries housed by the GYCA ([www.youthaidscoalition.org](http://www.youthaidscoalition.org)), began in the fall of 2006 by young participants who are living with HIV at the World Health Organization (WHO) Global Consultation, "Strengthening the Health Sector Response to Care, Support, Treatment and Prevention for Young People Living with HIV" in Malawi, November 2006. Living Positively created opportunities for YPLHIV to advocate to decision makers such as the May 21st Delegates Briefing at the UN Secretariat, hosted by the Government of Jamaica and UNFPA, to ensure that YPLHIV's issues and rights were on government delegations' agendas during the June UNGASS High Level Meetings on HIV and AIDS. Two young people from the GYCA and the Living Positively networks addressed delegates with remarks about their experiences that YPLHIV face in Egypt, Kenya and worldwide. Living Positively also conducts research and advocacy with the WHO around issues of disclosing their status, sexuality and motherhood, prevention and treatment, access to information and services, and is helping to create global standards for health services reaching YPLHIV.

Hope's Voice International ([www.hopesvoice.org](http://www.hopesvoice.org)) was established in 2004 by YPLHIV at a time when there were few networks that worked with and advocated for YPLHIV. HVI is a global leader of HIV and AIDS education, awareness and stigma-fighting campaigns. The HVI speakers travel to high schools, colleges and universities creating open dialogue and sharing the message – "HIV does not discriminate". The agency, in four short years, has reached over half a million students with direct programs and the Does HIV Look Like Me? campaign materials in the United States. HVI has trained over 40 YPLHIV in the United States to be speakers.

HVI launched the campaign Does HIV Look Like Me? ([www.doesHIVlooklikeme.org](http://www.doesHIVlooklikeme.org)) and leadership trainings in November of 2007. The campaign features the videos and a print campaign featuring ambassadors who are YPLHIV from around the world. Leadership trainings provide YPLHIV the tools, skills and conversations on building sustainable movements in their community and country. The campaign has expanded in partnership with UNFPA, the Global Network of People Living with HIV (GNP+) and the International Planned Parenthood Federation of Mexico, South Africa and Swaziland. The Does HIV Look Like Me? campaign currently has 150 ambassadors in Mexico, South Africa, Swaziland, United States the United Kingdom.

The Does HIV Look Like Me? campaign just launched a new, interactive online membership platform in partnership with TakingITGlobal and GYCA, and is available for any YPLHIV to join (anonymously, if they choose) offering extensive online social networking features such as blogs, instant messaging, a global directory of members' profiles, and an e-group to connect and sustain the movement of YPLHIV. Living Positively' current members have been merged into the Does HIV Look Like Me online membership community to share opportunities and information, and a global directory of YPLHIV. YPLHIV can join the interactive online community by visiting [www.doesHIVlooklikeme.org](http://www.doesHIVlooklikeme.org).

Instead of creating duplicate structures, the Living Positively network has been strengthened and empowered by HVI's strong branding and communications platform. Living Positively's host, GYCA, will continue to empower YPLHIV with leadership, advocacy, and training opportunities as a strategic partner of Hopes Voice International. By providing an interactive platform for sharing perspectives and experiences living with HIV, we hope to help to assess progress, identify gaps and challenges, and inspire other young people to take action in new and innovative ways.

The strengthened network will be highly active during the XVII International AIDS Conference in Mexico City in August of 2008. Come visit us in the YPLHIV networking space in the Youth Pavilion at the International AIDS Conference to meet YPLHIV attending the conference, view the multi-media Does HIV Look Like Me? campaign and join the interactive online community.