

# **Ministry of Foreign Affairs stops effective AIDS programs**

## **Dutch AIDS organizations are amazed and shocked**

**In a period when questions are being raised about the effect of development aid, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is cutting back in an area where demonstrable results have been achieved: the fight against AIDS. Eleven cooperating AIDS organizations will get no money from the ministry to continue their work. This decision was announced yesterday. It means that in the next five years, the Netherlands will contribute €100 million less to the international fight against AIDS. The partnership is amazed and shocked. It calls on politicians to intervene so that the most vulnerable groups in the AIDS epidemic do not become victims of this cutback.**

### **Incomprehensible cutbacks**

Earlier this year a report was published by the Scientific Council for Government Policy (WWR) in which the fight against AIDS was named as one of the four issues which Dutch development aid should focus on. The reason: it has been proved that reducing HIV and AIDS leads to economic growth in developing countries. In particular, vulnerable groups like gay men, drug users, sex workers, and even women, young people and children will be the victims of this cutback. Internationally, the Netherlands is one of the few countries that works so actively to help these groups. Resistance against HIV inhibitors will also have ample chance to develop in these poor countries. Without the work of the 11 organizations, Dutch AIDS policy cannot be carried out.

### **Effective programs**

AIDS strikes people in the most productive phase of their life. Ensuring that people do not get HIV and AIDS therefore contributes to the economic growth of developing countries. This year nearly 2 million people will die of the consequences of AIDS, the majority in the world's poorest countries and from the most vulnerable groups. Until now all the partners have received a subsidy and the ministry has always been extremely positive about how the money was spent. The ministry wanted a partnership to be formed and the HIV/AIDS consortium met this requirement by developing a joint program with 11 organizations. What happens now: by excluding the partnership, specific AIDS projects by the Netherlands will be cut back to nothing!

### **Far-reaching consequences for the most vulnerable groups**

The decision by the ministry will have direct consequences for the most vulnerable groups within the AIDS sector. The application by the partnership concerns 23 different countries where practically no one else provides services for these vulnerable groups. Dutch NGOs play a unique role in reaching and supporting these groups. In many poor countries homosexuality is an offence or something you have to keep quiet about. In the meantime, HIV is spreading rapidly amongst men who have sex with men. In some African countries, four out of ten gay men have HIV. Partners Schorer and COC have developed special programs that, despite the difficulties, reach gay men in poor countries and inform them about the risks of HIV and the importance of testing. These programs are threatened with cancellation as a result of the Dutch cutbacks. Drug users in Asia and Eastern Europe are also the victims of this cutback. Needle exchange programs funded by the Netherlands will also have to end. The number of HIV infections among – mainly young – drug users will increase.

### **Increase in resistant HIV**

It is highly important that professionals in developing countries have sufficient knowledge and that research is carried out into resistance against HIV inhibitors to prevent a resistant virus from spreading further. Worldwide the AIDS Fonds has the only program that charts the occurrence of resistance against AIDS inhibitors in developing countries. This program must now be abruptly ended.

### **Partnership**

The partnership of 11 AIDS organizations consists of the Aids Fonds, STOP AIDS NOW!, dance4life international, Schorer, COC, Mainline, Aids Foundation East-West, the Global Network of People

Living with HIV, Health Connections International, International Civil Society Support and World Aids Campaign.

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