

UN Cares India: the ILO leads the way forward

On 1 December 2010, a van was parked on Lodi Estate, in the city centre of New Delhi, India, with an unusual mandate: to offer voluntary and confidential HIV counselling and testing. The mobile clinic was part of the activities organized jointly by the United Nations (UN) agencies to raise awareness on HIV among their staff members.

World AIDS Day 2010 was a time for commemoration, celebration and exchanges for the crowd gathered on the lawns of Lodi Estate. More than 200 women and men working for UN agencies, staff representatives from the Federation of United Nations Staff Associations (FUNSA), senior management and heads of agencies were demonstrating unity under a common United Nations banner, that of UN Cares.

UN Cares is the UN-system-wide workplace programme on HIV, and the ILO has been playing a lead role in this inter-agency programme in India. Mr Coeur-Bizot, UN Resident Coordinator in India, paid special tribute to the “pioneering effort” of the ILO, which set up the HIV inter-agency programme back in 2003 - some five years before UN Cares was launched.

The team of HIV specialists on the ground knows that each practical step towards better knowledge, skills and information about HIV and AIDS are potentially saving lives among the staff members and their families. On the Lodi Estate lawns, Ms Divya Verma, Senior Programme Officer at the



ILO and UN Cares India Coordinator, encouraged all UN staff members and their families to use the mobile facility by the AIDS Health Care Foundation, a partner of the event, to know their HIV status or exchange on HIV-related information.

Some 40 participants, including staff members, management officials, security and support staff came forward to know their status.

Whether employees, managers or relatives, all attendees were encouraged to participate in playful exercises to assess and improve their knowledge and skills about HIV and AIDS.

“Greater ownership of the UN Cares initiative by the managers is needed”, Ms Tine Staermose, Director of the ILO Office for India and current Chair of the national Inter-Agency Task Team for UN Cares, said.

Ms Staermose pointed out that the presence of heads of agencies and managers was indeed of critical importance in order to achieve UN Cares objectives.

For more information, please contact:

Ms Divya Verma, ILO Coordinator for UN Cares India: verma@ilo.org



UN agencies in India are coordinating their efforts to ensure that a comprehensive range of benefits in relation to HIV will be de facto accessible to all UN staff members and their families. Access to both male and female condoms, to voluntary counselling and testing, to PEP kits in case of accidental exposure to HIV are some of the targets captured in UN Cares' ten "minimum standards".

The programme has developed a fruitful partnership with the Delhi Network of Positive People to ensure greater involvement of people living with HIV. The programme covered some 1,200 staff in the first phase that was implemented until 2006. It expanded in 2007 with the goal of reaching out to spouses and adolescents in the families of UN staff. Development partners were also encouraged to set in place their own HIV programmes directed at staff members with technical assistance from the ILO.

UN Cares India is an example of a well integrated and wide-reaching HIV programme operating at the UN workplaces. It has now entered phase three in the implementation timeline. Now, said Mr Patrice Coeur-Bizot, "the focus is on making it sustainable".

In 2011, maximizing inter-agency collaboration will be the main challenge: "Each agency's ownership of this initiative counts in making it a success", the UN Resident Coordinator said.

Greater emphasis will be placed in the coming year on strengthening the coordination and engagement roles of the officials representing UN Cares India inside each agency - called "Focal points" in the United Nations setting. The full support granted by staff representatives through Ms Amrita Mehrotra, President of FUNSA, bodes well, too, for the future of the HIV workplace programme in India.

