



Declaration on HIV/AIDS



Adopted by COSATU Special Congress, 20 August 1999

This Special Congress of COSATU notes the relentless advance of HIV and AIDS since the 1997 Congress.

3,5 million people in South are infected with the Human Immuno-deficiency Virus (HIV). Life expectancy in South Africa will reduce to 40-45 over the next ten years and health care costs will be beyond the capacity of survivors to pay for. It is now clear that publicity and condom distribution, though important, are not enough. This requires a new approach and strategy, based on a partnership between government and civil society in which the organised working class should play a leading role. Against this background, Congress adopts the following:

1. HIV/AIDS to be declared a national emergency by the government.
2. COSATU will run a systematic education programme both on prevention and to raise awareness amongst COSATU members of the information about HIV/AIDS treatment and care.
3. COSATU will develop and distribute information and training packs for shop-stewards and union leaders which include guidance on giving positive assistance to workers living with HIV/AIDS affected by discrimination.
4. It will develop, with the assistance of specialist AIDS organisations, counseling and other services to union members and staff.
5. COSATU will engage Bargaining councils on the issue of funds and to ensure that Sector Education and Training Authorities are linking education and the issue of HIV/AIDS
6. COSATU will continue to work with the Treatment Action Campaign to campaign:
 - in support of the government's progressive legislation on medicines;
 - against multinational pharmaceutical companies which make huge profits on medicines;
 - for COSATU's existing policy on accessible primary health care and basic needs such as clean water, critical in prolonging the life of people living with HIV/AIDS.
7. COSATU will fight to ensure that the Minimum Benefits under the Medical Schemes Act provide affordable and effective treatment benefits for people with HIV/AIDS.
8. COSATU will continue to work in the most vulnerable sections of the working class such as transport workers, migrant workers, and workers in the single sex hostels should be intensified.
9. We re-affirm the Exco decision that, as part of fighting the silence of those who are living with HIV/AIDS, COSATU will encourage its leadership and members to voluntarily take HIV/AIDS test and break the silence. A new culture of openness will be encouraged, including encouraging parents to talk openly to their children, friends, and relatives about this epidemic and the need to use condoms.
10. COSATU will continue to fight against discrimination based on any unfair grounds, including HIV/AIDS status. In this regard, COSATU will make a submission to the Equality Legislation, and call for the improvement of the Employment Equity Act to protect the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS.
11. A more detailed COSATU policy must be developed, to be tabled at the next central committee meeting. Such a policy must also relate to the bigger question imposed by the epidemic given our poor social security net. COSATU must carry out a study on the socio-economic impact the epidemic will have on the country. This should be linked to issue of affordability and availability of drugs such as AZT that prolong the life of those carrying the disease.
12. For this programme to succeed, COSATU must invest both human and material resources. The Health and Safety unit of the federation, must co-ordinate the program

