

## HIV counselling and testing

HIV is an important threat to the men, women and families of the SPLA, and so to the nation. Leading the fight against HIV in the SPLA is the SPLA HIV Secretariat headquartered in Juba. The HIV Secretariat works closely with the Chief of Staff, the SPLA Medical Corps, the Training unit, Operations, Signal, the Southern Sudan AIDS Commission and the HIV/AIDS directorate in the Ministry of Health among others.



### Heard of VCT?

- VCT means Voluntary Counselling and Testing for HIV.
- VCT is a service where an individual can decide on his/her own to go for confidential discussions with a counselor on issues related to his/her HIV status.
- VCT is for couples (a man and his wife or wives), families and single individuals.

### Why VCT?

HIV testing is part of the fight against the virus. Knowing your HIV status helps you protect yourself and others, including your family. Testing is the only way to know if you or partner or partners have HIV.

### Meaning of Results

Results can be positive or negative:

- Negative results mean that the test has not detected (found) the antibodies (soldiers) that fight the HIV virus in your body. You should take another test in 3 months to make sure of the results.
- Positive results mean that the test has detected (found) the antibodies (soldiers) that fight HIV virus in your body meaning you have the HIV virus.

Most people who go for testing are HIV negative, and the counselling helps them learn

how to keep their family safe from HIV. In VCT, people are also given education on safer sexual practices such as the use of condoms to avoid HIV infection.

Some people are positive. A man or woman who finds out in time that he or she is HIV positive can stop the spread to his wife or her husband or sexual partners and the family.

There is no cure for HIV but there is treatment -medicines that help an HIV positive person stay healthy.



Lainya VCT Center

The SPLA leadership will work hard to be able to care for soldiers and families who have HIV. With proper care and support, military personnel with HIV will remain healthy and fit for duty for many years. HIV testing is the only way to know if a person or a family needs medical care or other support for HIV. SPLA commanders at different levels have an important role to play in supporting HIV+ military personnel.

## VCT Achievements for the SPLA forces

By David Marle

The SPLA HIV/AIDS Secretariat and its implementing partner IntraHealth International Inc. have so far established seven (7) fixed VCT centers. Four (4) VCT centers were opened in 2008 as per the SPLA HIV/AIDS Strategic Plan, 2008-2011. The VCT centers are located as follows:

1. Mess 40 VCT located at Customs market in Juba
2. Juba Military Hospital VCT center located within the JIU hospital in Juba



**“Know your status; protect your family for a strong SPLA”**

3. Bilfam VCT located at the SPLA GHQs at the New Site, Juba
4. Lainya VCT located at the Lainya Army Barracks
5. Nimule VCT located at the Nimule Army Barracks
6. Yei VCT center located at the Yei Army Garrison
7. Owinykibul VCT Center located at the Owinykibul General Training Centre.



*Yei Barracks staff*

The VCT centers provide HIV/AIDS education and counseling and testing using rapid tests. Each VCT has a minimum of two qualified VCT counselors who are ready to provide the services at any given time to the SPLA forces, their families and also to civilians.

In addition to the seven fixed VCT centers, the VCT counselors also conduct mobile counseling and testing. Mobile counseling and testing brings the VCT service closer to the troops thus eliminating the problems associated with access to the fixed site.

## World AIDS Day 2008

*Adapted from the UNAIDS website*

1 December 2008 marks the 20th anniversary of World AIDS Day. Since 1988, efforts made to respond to the epidemic have produced positive results, however, the latest UNAIDS report on the global AIDS epidemic indicates that the epidemic is not yet over in any part of the world.

This year's theme for World AIDS Day is "LEAD – EMPOWER – DELIVER", building on last year's theme of "Take the Lead." Designating leadership as the World AIDS Day theme for 2007 – 2008 provides an opportunity to highlight both the political leadership needed to fulfill commitments that have been made in the response to AIDS – particularly the promise of universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010 – and celebrating the leadership that has been witnessed at all levels of society.

## 2008 WAD activities for the SPLA forces and their families

*By David Marle*

SPLA HIV/AIDS Secretariat with support from IntraHealth plans two weeks of pre World AIDS Day activities covering the SPLA's 2nd and 3rd Divisions.

**LEAD-** The behaviour change communication staff including the HIV/AIDS educators and focal persons will conduct commander sensitization workshops for senior, mid and junior level commanders at the division, brigade, and battalion headquarters. Massive HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns will also be conducted at the general parades.

**EMPOWER-** The HIV/AIDS educators will empower the SPLA community by conducting HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns for the troops and their families.

**DELIVER-** The VCT counsellors will work hand in hand with the HIV/AIDS educators and focal persons to conduct mobile counseling and testing activities following each educational campaign.

In addition to the mobile counselling and testing services, the fixed VCT sites referred to earlier will be open to provide counselling and testing services Monday through Friday, 9am to 5pm. The Bilfam treatment center will also be open to provide HIV/AIDS treatment services as needed.

On December 1, the SPLA HIV/AIDS Secretariat join hands with other uniformed services (police, prisons, wildlife and fire brigade) and march together in the much celebrated World AIDS Day parade.



*SPLA HIV awareness campaign with Guddale JIU forces*

### For comments and contributions, contact:

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