

PRESS RELEASE

Pehchan marks World AIDS Day by celebrating community unity and action

November 29, 2011, New Delhi : Organisations working with groups vulnerable to HIV/AIDS came together on 29 November at YMCA New Delhi for an event organised by the Pehchan programme to commemorate World AIDS Day 2011. 'Pehchan' literally means 'identity,' and the programme supports men who have sex with men (MSM), transgenders and *hijras* to increase their access to HIV/AIDS services in the country.

Pehchan, which has recently completed its first year, is implemented by a consortium of organisations led by India HIV/AIDS Alliance, covering 17 states. By 2015, it will reach over 4,50,000 people and build capacity of 200 community-based organisations working with sexual minorities. Funded by the Global Fund, Pehchan will ensure that these organisations are able to be effective partners with the Government of India's national response to the epidemic.

According to James Robertson, India HIV/AIDS Alliance Country Director, "MSM, transgenders and hijras are disproportionately affected by HIV in this country and around the world. India has been a leader by placing them prominently in its national response."

Speaking at the event, Ms. Aradhana Johri, Additional Secretary National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO), affirmed the importance of these populations to the national HIV prevention strategy. Over the next few years, Pehchan will enable a robust collaboration with the government programme to support NACO's ambitious prevention goals.

The Pehchan World AIDS Day event featured a short dramatic performance by celebrated actress Mona Ambegaokar that focused on a mother who gradually comes to terms with her son's sexual identity. A stunning Bollywood-style dance number was performed by Abhina Aher, the Programme Manager of Pehchan. Abhina is a transgender who has faced challenges as she established her identity and now brings her insights about the consequences of marginalisation to her work with Pehchan. For her, the programme's major achievements have been to recognise the diversity of sexual minorities in India and to develop a vital partnership with government to address HIV and improve the lives of these groups.

About India HIV/AIDS Alliance:

The India HIV/AIDS Alliance (Alliance India) is a diverse partnership that brings together committed organisations and communities to support a sustained response to HIV in India. Complementing the national programme in India, it works through capacity building, knowledge sharing, technical support and advocacy. Through our network of partners, Alliance India supports the delivery of effective, innovative, community-based HIV programmes to key groups affected by the epidemic.

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