

**EXECUTIVE BOARD STATEMENT TO THE
TORONTO & YORK REGION LABOUR COUNCIL
GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING
THURSDAY, AUGUST 3, 2006**

“HIV/AIDS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE”

HIV/AIDS represents the most serious global health crisis for centuries. From a handful of reported cases in 1981, the current numbers of people living with HIV/AIDS amounts to around 40 million. The virus continues to spread throughout the world, shadowed by increasing challenges to human rights, at both national and global levels.

This summer Toronto hosts the World AIDS Conference, whose theme “Time to Deliver”, underscores the continued urgency in bringing effective HIV prevention and treatment strategies to communities the world over. The scientific knowledge and tools to prevent new infections and prolong life among those living with HIV/AIDS already exist, even in the poorest settings. What is lacking is the collective will to translate that knowledge and experience into broadly available and affordable HIV treatment and prevention programs.

This message has been powerfully delivered by Stephen Lewis, whose unrelenting efforts to bring attention to its devastating effects in Africa stand in stark contrast to the inaction of most world leaders. As the number of people living with HIV and with AIDS continues to grow in nations with different economies, social structures, and legal systems, HIV/AIDS-related human rights issues are becoming more apparent and increasingly diverse. Profit levels of multinational drug companies are glaringly counter-posed to the lives of millions in the global south.

In Toronto, the struggle around this issue has a long history. Gay community activists led the fight for an adequate response from our health care system, including the city’s public health department. The provincial government was pressured to create a catastrophic drug policy, allowing those living with AIDS to have drug costs covered without having to quit work and go on social assistance. Sexual health education programs were developed for our schools.

But recent data highlights that in Canada HIV is increasingly affecting the disadvantaged, as marginalized populations face higher rates of new infection and have poorer access to health care and support when infected and ill. There is considerable concern that it may not be high enough on the priorities of the new Local Health Integration Networks, especially in central Toronto with its concentration of people living with AIDS.

The Executive Board recommends that Labour Council:

1. welcome the delegates to the World AIDS Conference, particularly those union members who are attending from around the world.
2. support the efforts of AIDS activists and public health workers to ensure that education, advocacy and treatment reaches every community through all available means, including the public funding to achieve that.
3. urge Toronto Public Health and the GTA LHINs to work closely to develop co-ordinated and effective responses in all these areas.
4. congratulate Stephen Lewis and other champions on the issue for their selfless dedication to raising public awareness about this global health crisis.