

National AIDS Treatment Advocacy Project

Day 2 in Vancouver- July 6

The first official day of proceedings at the Community Forum was supposed to start at 9 am. By about 10 am the "Opening Ceremony" was started with an extraordinary gathering of diverse people from all around the globe. A few Canadian conference organizers made some opening comments, but for me the most moving talk of this morning's opening session was that presented by Mary Jane Musungu of Uganda. She said HIV is a cultural socio-economic and political problem. She urged Americans to share their skills with the people from third world countries with the hope and expectation that it might help towards improving their lot.

The overall theme for the Community Forum is at once---global solidarity, local action and regional strategy. An opening speaker from India, Swaminathan Sundararaman, spoke of his hope from the Forum of "regional actions plans to obtain and sustain empowerment." The Forum planning and organizing committees are composed of representatives from Canada, USA, India, Zambia, Argentina, Japan, Chile, United Kingdom, Mexico, Uganda and South Africa.

In Canada, their AIDS programs are all encompassed into a "National AIDS Strategy." Apparently, when the funding for these programs end in the near future, the reformist conservative government is planning to "dismantle" the program. The Canadian Prime Minister was invited to the Int'l. AIDS Conference but will not show up; his Health Minister will address the Conference, but Canadian activists are requesting that when he speaks all of the community activists rise and turn away from him.

The Forum organizers are hoping to achieve ambitious and idealistic goals from this Community Forum: to provide participants with a framework for collecting strategic planning and policy information; to provide an apparatus for skills building; to create international skills networking opportunities; and to provide a general orientation to the Conference for all the delegates.

How successful they will be is uncertain to me and others.

Howard Engel of Canada spoke about the need for access to drugs and medical care for third world PWAs. This is a lofty goal, but in fact many of these countries do not even offer the most basic vaccines for children nor offer basic living necessities to their citizens. The reality of providing to them protease inhibitors in combination therapy seems very ambitious.

Many American attendees at this forum realized that for third world countries, access to optimal antiretroviral therapy seems unlikely. Many of these countries cannot offer PCP prophylaxis to PWAs. Some Forum attendees were unsure they could offer much to the attendees from the third world. When we discussed e-mail and the Internet, it was lost on most. However, there is the possibility that some of the discussion and networking will in

some way be productive to the third world.

A more realistic outcome from the Forum for me and NATAP is a closer working relationship with Canadian activists and possibly with Puerto Rico.

Anyway, tomorrow will be the 2nd and final day of the Community Forum. An official statement will emerge from the Forum. Sunday the pre-conference symposiums begin, and the conference begins with opening ceremonies Sunday evening.