



① [www.wakeuppune.org](http://www.wakeuppune.org)    ✉ [info@wakeuppune.org](mailto:info@wakeuppune.org)    ☎ +91 20 25460102

PRESS RELEASE - 20 MAY 2007

**Candlelit vigil and stage show LIGHTS UP PUNE to support those living with HIV  
Citizens pledge to end HIV stigma**

*Wake up Pune...Wake up...There IS life after HIV...HIV ke saath bhi zindagi hai...HIV ke baad bhi zindagi hai!*

That was the message delivered by *Indian Idol* Sandeep Acharya to a crowd of thousands assembled at MG Road Walking Plaza on Sunday evening, present for a rally, candlelight vigil and stage show organised by the *Wake Up Pune* coalition to show support for all those living with and affected by HIV.

Tied in with Global AIDS Action Week (20-25 May), the rally, vigil and stage show were the culmination of a day of events including street plays, competitions, presentations and interactive sessions, an information kiosk and activities at INOX cinema, and a mobile awareness vehicle visiting strategic locations in the city.

Two rallies took place: one started from Golibar Maidan (organised by *Wake Up Pune*) and the other from Sassoon Hospital (organised by CYDA), finally coming together to converge at MG Road Walking Plaza. Both had an impressive number of participants. "We're delighted at the turnout. People have come together from across civil society to show their support for people living with and affected by HIV," said *Wake Up Pune* spokesperson Vandana Apte, from Satyam Foundation.

When it came to the stage show, the crowds at MG Road Walking Plaza were treated to an exciting programme, featuring performances from *Indian Idol* winner Sandeep Acharya, *Fame X 2006* winner Rehan Khan and local rock band Blue Mist. Children from the Sahara Aalhad project sang the *Wake Up Pune* theme song 'I Believe' and youngsters from Deep Griha Society's DISHA project performed a dance which proved particularly popular with the audience.

Speaking at the event, Guest of Honour Mr Vijay Jadhav (President, Block Congress Committee, Pune Cantonment) said, "It is the duty of each one of us to spread correct information about HIV. Let us not discriminate. Stigma kills more than HIV does."

The show was hosted by Mr Marzban Irani, accompanied by chief guest and noted HIV activist Mr Vijay Nayar. During the show, Vijay shared his HIV positive status with the audience and observed that in spite of substantial awareness about HIV, there is a lot of discrimination experienced by those affected by it. "A concerted effort is needed at every level of the society to catalyse shift in this attitude," he pointed out. "Although this day is being celebrated in memory of those who died of AIDS, let us think about the situation of those PLHIV who face a lot of discrimination from all corners, which is worse than death." His remark came in the wake of the recent media report about the shunning of an HIV+ person by four hospitals in Uttar Pradesh. Also speaking was Ms Sunita Jagdap, HIV peer counsellor from Project Concern International. "This shows that the persons and the families of those who are no more due to HIV/AIDS are not alone in their struggle and have the support from the society, NGOs and even the government machinery."

Vijay called upon the gathering to "Practice safe sex and be healthy." To his counterparts, members of the HIV+ Network, he had a very important message to give: "Take life positively, and inspire others to do so." Vijay lit the first candle for the vigil, passing the flame on to the Mayor and then to the assembled crowd. A minute's silence was observed to remember - and show support for - all those affected by HIV. "Actually, we're *all* affected," said Mike Marshall, from Sahara Aalhad Care Home, Wagholi. "We can't afford to bury our heads in the sand any longer. We must educate ourselves about HIV and stop stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV."

As well as performing two songs, *Indian Idol 2* winner Sandeep Acharya gave a message to the crowd. "Let us join hands with people who are HIV positive and move ahead together. Wake Up Pune! There is life with HIV, and life after HIV. Life doesn't stop." His comments were echoed by singer Rehan Khan, winner of *Fame X*



① [www.wakeuppune.org](http://www.wakeuppune.org) ✉ [info@wakeuppune.org](mailto:info@wakeuppune.org) ☎ +91 20 25460102

2006. "We're having this memorial for people who are no longer with us. And for those living with HIV, I want to tell you that you are not alone. We are all with you. Pune city is with you. The whole country is with you."

Speaking on behalf of a group of prominent social leaders, Mr Bhagwan Wayal (President of the Congress Sports Committee) read out a pledge, promising to tackle HIV, educate youth and prevent discrimination. He confirmed: "We will not stigmatise people infected with HIV. We will help them to live a healthy and positive life. We will strive to make our city of Pune a place where nobody will die due to stigma about HIV and AIDS."

The show concluded with a rocking performance from Pune's very own Blue Mist.

-----

Pune ranks among the top five HIV prevalence cities in the state. NACO (2002) estimates that 1.8% of the population is HIV positive<sup>1</sup>, twice the national average and almost double the WHO epidemic mark of 1%.<sup>2</sup> In reality the situation may be even worse, since so few people infected with HIV come forward for help for fear of discrimination and stigma. There is a real need to educate people in Pune about HIV in order to reduce both its spread and the resulting stigma and discrimination experienced by PLHIV.



-----

**What is Global AIDS Action Week?**

Global AIDS Action Week (20-25 May) reflects the groundswell of civil society voices from across the world to demand stronger response, more accountability and more resources in the fight against HIV and AIDS. Through this event, Pune has contributed to the campaign.

Full details about the campaign can be found on the website - [www.wakeuppune.org](http://www.wakeuppune.org).

Contact: [info@wakeuppune.org](mailto:info@wakeuppune.org)  
Vandana Apte 9890990400  
Mike Marshall 9860624230



MUKTAA HIV/AIDS HELPLINE

For photographs, contact Hans Billimoria on 9823599274, or email [deepgriha@gmail.com](mailto:deepgriha@gmail.com).

<sup>1</sup> NACO, <http://www.nacoonline.org>

<sup>2</sup> NACO, <http://www.nacoonline.org>