



# AFRICAN SERVICES

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## COMMITTEE

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## UN High Level Meeting on AIDS Produces Results



On June 8-10 of this year the World's leaders convened at the United Nations to review the progress made in the fight against HIV/AIDS, and to chart the future course of the global AIDS response. This year marked a milestone since the world was also recognizing the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the AIDS epidemic.

African Services Committee, along with other local organizations, took part in several meetings and actions to help foster support for continued funding and reform. As world leaders attempted to retreat on their funding promises, ASC and hundreds of activists rallied together to hold them accountable at the End AIDS Now rally.



Major issues being dealt with at the UN High Level Meeting on AIDS revolved around new treatment and funding targets. In addition, many hoped to see vulnerable populations recognized by the UN as key at-risk populations.

Overall, many would consider the meeting a success as advances were made in several areas. Here is a summary of the key developments from the meeting:

1. **Treatment Targets Established:** 15 million people on Anti-Retroviral Treatment (ART) by 2015
2. **Global Funding Targets Established:** \$22 billion annually to be collected and spent on global AIDS programs by 2015
3. **HIV/AIDS Prevention Targets Established:** Commitment to work towards reducing sexual transmission of HIV and among people who inject drugs by 50 percent by 2015, and a commitment to work towards the elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV by 2015 and substantially reducing AIDS-related maternal deaths.
4. **Vulnerable Populations Recognized in UN Decree:** Several at risk populations were recognized by the UN declaration, including men who have sex with men (MSM), sex workers, and injecting drug users.
5. **HIV Medicines Access:** Commitment to removing/reducing trade and intellectual property barriers preventing access to affordable HIV treatment by promoting generic competition, utilizing flexibilities under the TRIPS Agreement, and encouraging voluntary participation of HIV medicines patent holders in the HIV Medicines Patent Pool, to permit development of new HIV treatment formulations and reduce treatment costs.

The High Level UN Meeting on AIDS brings together leaders from all over the world, and directs focus on the global battle against AIDS. We can only hope that as the meetings end and time passes, that we never forget the promises and commitments made, and that by 2015 we can be even closer to the goal of eradicating AIDS.

-Stephanie Kaplan

## News and Activities

### ASC Women's Group Speaks Out Against NY Post Coverage



On May 18, 2011 the New York Post published an exclusive article titled, "Hotel Maid in HIV Shock." The content and subject of this article was in relation to emerging details surrounding the former IMF chief, Dominique Strauss-Kahn case.

The New York Posts' deliberate criminalization and sensationalism of HIV was a blow to all that the members of African Services' HIV-positive support group are working towards, and all that African Services Committee and other HIV service organizations across the city are working towards. **HIV stigma still proves to be the NUMBER ONE barrier to HIV testing, treatment and care, and sadly this article did nothing to push us towards our goal of eliminating HIV stigma within the general New York City community.**

Our women's group called an emergency meeting, as they felt compelled to protest the callous actions of the NY Post and to express their disappointment. See their letter below.

NY Post Front Page on May 18, 2011

You can also learn more about the effects of HIV stigma and educate yourself on how to stop it by visiting our HIV Anti-stigma website, [www.whystand.org](http://www.whystand.org).

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To the editor-

*We are writing to express our sadness and dismay regarding the NY Post article and headline, "Hotel Maid in HIV Shock" published on May 18, 2011. We are a group of HIV positive African women who meet regularly at African Services Committee to combat the very stigma that your article has now magnified in our community.*

*In an effort to boost sales of your paper, you have effectively endangered the life of a woman and her family, while stifling the entire African community's grassroots efforts to promote HIV testing, treatment, and acceptance of Africans living with HIV. Your implication and sensationalism of her HIV positive status, and that of every adult resident in her building, set us back decades in the struggle against HIV stigma. We have always believed that in America our HIV status was confidential, and that we could live a life free of discrimination and stigma. This*

hope was shattered by your article, and as beneficiaries of safe housing for people living with HIV, created fear that it was our building that was referred to in the article and that we may have been "outed."

Your article re-invigorated old myths surrounding HIV within the African community: the myth that HIV is something to fear, and something to be ashamed of. These myths trickled down to us—those living with the daily fear of having our status disclosed. We heard our own community members' ignorant opinions, spurred by the hype of the news story; opinions that we have been working tirelessly to combat.

We are faced with the fact that our HIV status forces us to hide a part of ourselves from everyone—including our families. That is why some of us keep our HIV medications in aspirin bottles, that is why some of our heads are bowed in hospital waiting rooms, that is why our brothers, sisters, and even husbands refuse to take an HIV test, and if you now tell us that if we report a crime we may be further victimized, you push us deeper into the background than we already are.

What is to happen to this woman now? Who will be there to support her? How will she ever go back to the life she had before? Fear, ignorance, misinformation and stigma make people believe that an HIV diagnosis equals certain death...but it is the same stigma, fear and ill-will-like that encouraged by your article—which will have the deepest and most enduring impact on people living with HIV.

We write this letter to stand in solidarity with our sister. She reported a crime, and you investigated her health status. As people living with HIV, this makes us afraid to ever report a crime ourselves. Is our HIV status a crime of which we are guilty?

We appeal to the African and New York community and ask that you open your hearts and your minds to all of the members of our community who are affected by HIV—**honest, hard-working members of ALL of our families**. We must stand together, and not let innuendos against HIV divide us. We all must educate ourselves and our communities about the facts of HIV—both here in New York City and on the African continent. We can either stand in silence and let HIV conquer us, or open our arms in acceptance and start a dialogue that will ultimately end the stigma that is killing our brothers and sisters.

We sincerely hope that your paper, and its employees, will consider these implications in the future.

Sincerely-

The Women of African Services

## ASC Legal Team Gives Hope

When Hassatou first came to African Services Committee in September 2010, she was struggling. Her housing situation was fragile, she lacked proper medical care, and she was desperately trying to deal with the violence and abuse she had suffered at the hands of family members.

Hassatou's story began in 2003 when she arrived in the United States to attend a medical conference in Washington, D.C. For years, she had worked for the Guinean Ministry of Health, and was excited about the opportunity to travel to the U.S. Unfortunately, during her time abroad, the political situation in Guinea deteriorated, forcing her to remain in the United States. She soon fell prey to ill-intentioned family members who transported her to Columbus, Ohio where they held her, abused her, and forced her into domestic servitude. After several years, Hassatou managed to escape to New York. Her experiences, however, left an indelible mark,

and she feared she would never be able to recover.



(L to R) Supervising Attorney, Andrea Panjwani, Hassatou, & Staff Attorney Kate Stinson pose for a photo after receiving the good news.

On the recommendation of a friend, Hassatou came to African Services in hopes that they might be able to help her with her legal situation. As she slowly opened up about her experiences, staff attorney Kate Stinson saw that her story resonated with many of the warning signs of human trafficking. Though a complex case, Kate was determined to obtain freedom for Hassatou and was eager to build a trafficking case that would make her eligible to adjust her status. Not only would that bring stability to her life, it would allow her access to the medical and psychological care she so desperately needed in overcoming the trauma caused by her experiences, it would also give her the foundation from which to rebuild her life. Working intensely with the legal department, she

started to see light at the end of the tunnel. She began speaking about the future, and how she would love to return to work. But despite the strides made in building her legal case, Hassatou still felt isolated and depressed.

One afternoon, after one of her meetings with legal staff, Hassatou happened to meet Rougi, another ASC client. It became apparent that both women were from the same small village in Guinea. Within minutes there were hugs and tears as they realized that they knew so many of the same people and places. For the first time in the seven years since she had left her country, Hassatou had found somewhere that felt like **home**. With the support of her new found friend and African Services, Hassatou has gone on to attend an African Services sponsored retreat to help support survivors of violence and trauma, she has become integrated into the Guinean community in New York, and started English classes. She carries herself with a new confidence, and speaks regularly about her "African Services family."

In June 2011, Hassatou's application to adjust her status based on her experience as a victim of human trafficking was approved. She was also granted her employment authorization, and has started to stabilize her housing and medical situation. When speaking with Hassatou, she can't say enough about African Services and Kate Stinson, the staff attorney that handled her case.

"I am so blessed to have Kate and ASC in my life.," says Hassatou, "It is because of her, because she listened to me, that I am here today."

Although the road ahead remains long and challenging, Hassatou has found a home away from home and a family at African Services that will walk with her and support her along that path.

**-Kate Stinson/Stephanie Kaplan**

## On the Ground in Ethiopia: A Volunteer's Story

*In the Fall of 2010, Natasha Pirogovsky approached African Services Ethiopia with a desire to donate her immense talents in the area of communications and marketing. In early 2011 Natasha embarked on a month-long adventure to Ethiopia where she had the opportunity to visit our clinics, and assist them with developing new communications material to utilize in the field. For the next 3 newsletters, she will get the opportunity to share her experiences and observations from the field...so stay tuned! Here is Part One: A Ferengi (Foreigner) Departs for Addis:*

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After 6 years in corporate marketing at L'Oreal, I decided to embark on a very different marketing and communications journey - one focused on grassroots outreach initiatives to help improve the quality of, and access to, care for marginalized and underprivileged populations.

This seemingly abstract concept at the time led me to African Services Committee and, ultimately, to abandoning my rapidly escalating corporate career in pursuit of greater social good.

And so, a *ferengi* (foreigner in Amharic) departs for Addis Ababa...

Upon arrival, the ubiquitous theme on the streets is poverty: children asleep on dirt floors near rotting garbage cans, older women with gangrene feet crouched on the side of busy roads, destitute mothers caring for a gaggle of children, and 5 year old boys wearing no shoes pleading for "sista" (me) to spare a birr. These scenes of extreme destitution are commonplace in Addis and in direct contrast to some of the more recent construction budding across the city. Infrastructure, telecommunications, and energy access are key developmental priorities in Addis at the expense of healthcare and educational priorities.



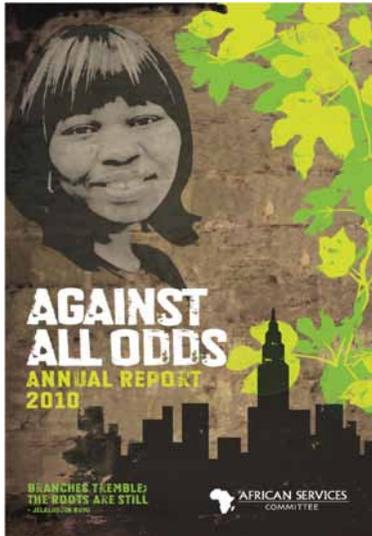
My research and work for ASC began on Day 2 at the Addis Ababa Shola Market Clinic following the on-location bi-monthly peer-support group. This informal gathering was developed to encourage women to exchange experiences and provide each other with the tools to ease the effects of stigma.



The Addis Ababa Shola Market Clinic is the largest of ASC Ethiopia's 4 clinics. Located in one of the busiest parts of town, the market area swarms with families shopping for food and basic household goods and is an area of town many commercial sex workers call home. In addition to providing patients with the highest caliber of HIV/AIDS voluntary counseling and testing, the Shola Clinic also provides a serene temporary respite for clients living in houses built of corrugated steel large enough to fit a bed and a child under it.

Want to learn more? Read Natasha's entire entry [here](#).

## African Services Committee Releases 2010 Annual Report



It's hard to believe, but we are halfway through 2011, and African Services Committee has released our Annual Report for fiscal year 2010. For those that haven't received the report, you can click [here](#) to download an online version.

The 2010 Annual Report--entitled "*Against All Odds*"--details our successes for 2010, including expansions in testing and legal assistance, HIV anti-stigma initiatives, and the growth of our Ethiopia programs. In spite of the harsh economic climate, African Services continues to not only survive, but thrive, and continues to be a beacon of hope to the immigrant community.

Please take a moment to read through the report and catch up on our work over the past year. **We thank you for your support in 2010 and look forward to your generosity in the year ahead.** Enclosed in the report, you will find a donation envelope. It is **your** generosity that makes our work possible, so mail back the

envelope or donate online [here](#). **No amount is insignificant!**

A large thanks goes out to graphic designer [Mackenzie Crone](#), who created the beautiful layout and design of the report. Additionally, we want to thank Rouguiatou, for appearing on the cover and as the featured client story. She is truly a shining example and inspiration for the work that we do.

### New Addition to the ASC Family

**Mj cbbY 'A VYk Y!DU'a Yf** is the Supervising Family Social Worker in the Family Case Management program. In this role, Yvonne provides case management services, individual and family therapeutic counseling sessions, facilitates bi-weekly support groups, conducts intakes of new clients, as well as supervises the family case management team.

Prior to working with ASC, Yvonne worked extensively with both adolescent girls who were victims of sexual human trafficking with Girls Educational & Mentoring Services (GEMS) and young adults in the juvenile justice system with Esperanza, NY. Yvonne is committed to working with young adults coupled with women's rights on both a domestic and global level. To that

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# Fun in the City

Staff Recommendations

Tamara Agins, African Services Intern recommends...

## Come Out & Play Field Day

**Where:** Governor's Island

**When:** Saturday, July 16th at 11:00 am-5 pm

**What:** Come Out & Play is an annual festival of street games that turns New York City into a giant playground.

A day of new and exciting outdoor games, from wild new field sports to large social games. Each year Come Out & Play features the best in experimental new real-world games. This year we bring the fun to Governors Island.

Find out more about the Come Out & Play events [here](#)

Hope to see you there!

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