

Music stars can be role models for young people on HIV

NAIROBI, 9 October 2009 – Music stars participating at the MTV Africa Music Awards (MAMAs) ceremony, being held tomorrow in Nairobi, Kenya, can have a significant impact in educating young people about HIV and changing their behaviour, according to UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibé. The event will be aired worldwide with an estimated TV audience of 1 billion viewers.

Today, young people aged 15 to 24 account for 45% of new HIV infections worldwide. Many of them lack basic knowledge about HIV prevention. Data from 64 countries indicate that only 40% of males and 38% of females aged 15 to 24 had accurate and comprehensive knowledge about HIV and how to avoid transmission.

“UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has encouraged UNAIDS to keep the leaders of tomorrow healthy today,” said Mr Sidibé. “The music stars at MTV Africa Music Awards can help fast-track awareness about HIV into the hearts and minds of African youth.”

Mr Sidibé congratulated Bill Roedy, Chairman & Chief Executive of MTV Networks International and the former Chair of the Global Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS, for his commitment to engaging the media in the AIDS response. “Through our close partnership with MTV over the years, we have used innovative communication tools to educate young people about HIV and help break the cycle of stigma and discrimination associated with AIDS,” said Mr Sidibé. He will be represented at the MAMAs by Dr Djibril Diallo, his Senior Advisor.

In 1998, UNAIDS partnered with MTV to launch the award-winning Staying Alive campaign (www.staying-alive.org). Ten years later, it has become the world’s largest, youth-focused, HIV prevention campaign. The multimedia campaign consists of films, documentaries, public service announcements, youth fora and web content produced for young audiences worldwide and available to third party broadcasters rights-free.

Staying Alive and MTV Base Africa, with support from UNICEF and the US Government, are producing a new explosive drama for World AIDS Day (1 December), entitled “Shuga”, which focuses on six young people and their relationships as well as the actions they take that put them at risk of HIV infection. Four actors from Shuga will be presenting an award at the MAMAs, and will stand on stage as strong role models for young people.

“This will be an opportunity to meet with some of the talented musicians, and talk directly to them about how they can help raise awareness of HIV and AIDS with their young audience,” said Mr. Roedy. “Using our global network to communicate HIV prevention messages is one of the most important things we can do to contribute to this cause. I want the media and business to show global leadership by educating the world to prevent the spread of HIV.”

Celebrating the best contemporary artists and music across Africa, the MAMAs will honour artists in 13 separate categories. The ceremony will be hosted by hip hop legend Wyclef Jean, who will also perform. Other performances from Africa’s music stars include Akon, M.I. (Nigeria), Wahu (Kenya), Samini (Ghana) and Lira (South Africa).

Some 22 million people are living with HIV in Africa, two-thirds of the global total. Two million people died of AIDS in 2007, and three-quarters of these deaths were in Africa. Increased commitment and funding is bringing about progress: more than 4 million people in low and

middle-income countries worldwide now receive life-saving treatment, but at least 5 million people are still in need of treatment.

For further information please contact:

UNAIDS New York – Richard Leonard | tel. +1 646 666 8003 | leonardr@unaids.org

UNAIDS Nairobi - Jacqueline Makokha | tel. +254 20 762 4389 | makokhaj@unaids.org

UNAIDS South Africa – Sheba Okwenje | tel. +27 11 517 1634 | okwenjeb@unaids.org

UNAIDS Geneva - Sophie Barton-Knott | tel. +41 22 791 1697 | bartonknotts@unaids.org

UNAIDS is an innovative joint venture of the United Nations, bringing together the efforts and resources of the UNAIDS Secretariat and ten UN system organizations in the AIDS response. The Secretariat headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland—with staff on the ground in more than 80 countries. The Cosponsors include UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank. Contributing to achieving global commitments to universal access to comprehensive interventions for HIV prevention, treatment, care and support is the number one priority for UNAIDS. Visit the UNAIDS Web site at www.unaids.org