

# International AIDS conference, Bangkok 2004

In the few minutes it takes to read this article, a dozen young people will be infected with HIV somewhere in the world.

HIV/AIDS has become a disease of the young, with nearly 6000 infections occurring among 15-24 year olds every day. It's a disease fuelled by poverty, gender inequality and complacency. Globally of the 40 million people living with HIV, more than 10 million are between the ages of 15-24. At the last UN Special Session on HIV/AIDS held in New York, world leaders adopted a commitment to prevent AIDS globally. And this year, the Bangkok AIDS conference has urged world leaders once again to fulfill their commitments.

The International AIDS Conference 2004 was held in Bangkok from 11-16 July. World Leaders like Kofi Anan, Nelson Mandela, Bill Gates Foundation President, UN organization executive directors, Miss Universe and other distinguished personalities attended the International AIDS Conference together with 20,000 delegates from all over the world.

I was privileged to be invited by the International AIDS Society based in Stockholm, Sweden who were the organizers of the conference to attend the AIDS conference. I was in fact awarded a full scholarship and travel grant by the International AIDS Society to attend the conference, as the youth representative of the region of South Asia.

Being a student, this was one opportunity for me to learn more about the most deadly disease and the most important concern of the world today-AIDS. It was also an excellent opportunity for me to network with young people from all over the world-20,000 delegates is really something big for me to discover!

I went to Bangkok on July 10



2004 with the Thai air ticket I was awarded. Bangkok is a very nice city. It's organized, clean and the people are awesome! It's truly a city of contrasts: Mercedes and BMWs passing poor shabby towns around the edge of the city. Bangkok is also a shopper's paradise. With some of the best shopping malls and plazas with the best and probably the cheapest street bazaars, Bangkok is really the place to be for any traveler: leisure of business. I have been reserved a 4-star hotel at Bangkok by the conference organizers and so after a little rest, I toured Bangkok, both as a tourist as well as a local. But when in Bangkok, it's fun to tour in the tourist way! I did some shopping and roamed around the city for sometime and went back to my hotel.

The next day, that is July 11 2004, was the first day of the conference. With the conference shuttle bus, I went to IMPACT convention center, which was very huge (and that meant I had to go exhausted walking through every corner of it everyday). It was really great!

The opening ceremony was held in the evening and I had one of the most outstanding opportunity to really meet Kofi Anan and Miss Universe and a lot of other world leaders. I also had a lifetime opportunity to meet the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms.

Carol Bellamy and the celebrity Richard Gere, FACE TO FACE!

From 12 July to 16 July, the conference came into action. There were skills building workshops, forums, meetings with world leaders, conferences, satellite sessions, press conferences, etc. It was really great because I could gain so much knowledge on AIDS, build my skills, take part in forums, meet with world leaders and also participate in interviews with journalists from all over the world. The whole world's media actually covered the conference and BBC made a special program on the Bangkok conference.

I took part in protests and rallies against the failed and unattended commitments that World Leaders made at the UN Special Session on AIDS in New York. I attended as many skills building workshops possible to really build my skills in different fields of advocacy, leadership, programming, networking, etc.

As the representative from South Asia at the conference, I also gave a speech at a skills building workshop and talked about AIDS issues in south asia in different sessions. Everything was amazing!

World leaders promised many new commitments and reviewed all the commitments that have already been made.

One of them, being funding the Global Fund of AIDS, TB and Malaria. Another, the 3 by 5 initiative to cure people living with AIDS.

Apart from the conference sessions, there were also NGO exhibitions and poster exhibitions where more than 650 NGOs and Posters were presented to the delegates with a bank of information for everyone!

One of the most exciting opportunities I had was networking! I made more than 150 friends from all over the world! Within only 6 days, we all came up to be very close! We went shopping, partying together and having such a great network of friends was amazing! I was also invited by the Swedish Ambassador to a reception and by the Global Health Council to a dinner while at Bangkok, but the conference sessions gave me very little room to do a lot of things, apart from attending the splendid working sessions of the conference.

I have also been entrusted the responsibility of the Coordinator of the Asia Youth Network formed at the Bangkok Conference. In the Asia Youth Network more than 45 countries are represented with an official representative of each country. Just right now, I was writing an e-mail to one of my friends I met from the conference.

AIDS is an issue which needs our attention immediately. It's an issue which is the worst possible curse for anyone. It's an issue which we needs access for all to know about it and fight it. And that was the International AIDS conference was aimed at: ACCESS FOR ALL to know and fight AIDS.

I would also love to share my conference reports with anyone who might be interested. If there is anyone who might, please e-mail me at: sayafhq@yahoo.com  
By S.S. Rishad

## Daddy, Please Wake Up



Dear Daddy,

My heart gives some thundering jolts as I look at you right now lying motionless in cabin # 301 of Metropolitan Clinic. With a mingled feeling of sorrow and anxiety draining my mind, I find you huddled within a complex mechanism of intertwining wires and tubes running all around you. White, heavy bandages wrap many parts of your limbs. Yet you look as unperturbed as ever. It seems as if you were having a light nap on the sofa back at home.

With your entire being engulfed by a deep, menacing trance, your unconscious self often drifts into unnerving hysterics. You fling your hands upwards, trying to rip apart the twin tubes entering your nose. And the occasional groans permeating from your mouth makes our hearts forget their natural momentum.

Most of the time Mom stands beside you, her eyes never drifting from you lest you need help at an odd moment. Her skin has wizened three folds, and from her looks you could tell that her age has doubled within a week. She continuously mumbles undecipherable words, (I guess) praying to the Almighty for you, for us.

Over the days, your condition has deteriorated. The pressure of the blood running in your veins has throbbled up to an alarming state. From the grave faces of the doctors after inspecting you, I can tell that they are bursting to tell us something. I just hope my presentiment does not turn true.

Here I am now, looking at you fighting undauntedly in your journey of recovery. Sometimes the helplessness in your visage overpowers me to such a high extent that I have to stifle the burning desire to detach all these tubes running around you from your body. Only then, I feel that you can drift back from your sleep to the real world - our world.

Good bye for now.

The worthless son of the greatest father in the world

By Mehrab Bin Bakhtiar

## From the eyes of a doleful defender

My encounter with football has been a very confusing story. Football has brought me moments of sheer glory. But then again, it has put me into times of bitter gloom. Such has been my puzzling career of football - an exciting and equally awful experience. So it continues to be - right up to the present day.

The first couple of years of my decade long football career were truly unforgettable and that is when I practically became addicted to the game. I started off playing as a striker (which is quite an achievement considering I was just a six-year-old kid!) and did justice to my sprouting football talent.

The reason why I was chosen to play the weighty role of a striker was because my right foot shot was incredible (no kidding). I could send the ball hurtling goal wards at amazing speeds and could even curl the ball in flight (a Beckham in the making!).

My job turned out to be very simple indeed! All throughout the game I would stand at an offside position, (of course, no one bothered about off-sides in such unofficial matches) and at times, even behind the goalkeeper when he would stroll towards the other half to catch some fresh air. The rest is...err...quite understandable. The ball would land right at my feet (from my half) and I would find myself absolutely unmarked (no one bothered to mark me as I was so small). Then, I would swing round in a flash; send the ball floating past the outstretched hands of the mesmerized goalkeeper with a deft touch of my right foot, to score yet another dazzling goal!

However, in case I found myself behind the

goalkeeper, I would do it the easy way. I would run all the way up to the goalpost, with the ball at my heels!

(Fluffing up too much, am I? Read on, and see me puncture!)

The good days didn't last long (do they ever?). I fell into a very barren period of goal scoring and for the umpteenth time sent the ball hurtling above the unguarded goalpost. With practice (!), I became so good at this that my unforgiving teammates unanimously agreed I would rather make a swell rugby player!

The disappointment seeped in and before long, I found myself making even more dreadful mistakes. My tenure as a striker was coming to a premature end. For me, it was heartbreaking - I craved for that one goal that would save my striking career. I was gripped with frustration and didn't know what was worse - not scoring goals or letting down my teammates time after time. For the first time in my career, I seriously considered quitting...

The goal came at last, but at the very wrong moment. It was on the very first day of my tryouts as a midfielder.

I was determined to play as badly as possible, to convince others that I belonged elsewhere. When the ball came to me, I wildly kicked at it without any apparent intention of sending it anywhere. I saw the ball soaring towards the blues and laughed. That should definitely be the worst shot I ever rendered!

It wasn't to be, because of the most ridiculous spectacle I ever saw. As the ball rose, so did my heart, but as it dipped, I started feeling sick.

Unknowingly I had kicked the ball goal wards and now it was dipping towards the top bar! And the goalkeeper was nowhere to be seen!

Oh! Yes! There he was! At the very edge of the D-box, having a nice little stroll and day dreaming! No one could stop the ball now. I watched in horror as the ball came down further, swooped under the top bar and found its home at the back of the net!

I had just scored a scorcher, an absolute gem! As my teammates broke out into whoops of ecstasy, I tried my best to hide the writhing agony that swelled my heart. I felt as if I had just been shot. Now, I HAD to play as a midfielder, I didn't have a choice! Football would no longer be a bed of roses for me or, for that matter, a walk in the park. It would be a hard-grinding game where I will have to toil endlessly and still come out with zero goals under my belt. I felt miserable and wondered whether ever choosing to play football, had been a blatant mistake.

However, my worst fears were proven wrong. My tenure as a midfielder didn't last long. The sickening part of the whole affair was that, I did not get back my striking position either! One month of fooling around in the midfield had finally backfired! When I expected to become a striker again, my teammates had other ideas. They hauled me with the greatest shame imaginable. They made me a blasted defender!

Now, my job is to stand at the same spot for hours and to ensure that the goalkeeper watches the cursed face of the opponent's striker as little as possible (how ironic!). If I leave my place to catch some fresh air, what I really catch are glares from my teammates or the sight of a lousy midfielder beckoning, "What in the blazes are you



doing? Get back at once!"

I have had enough! Next time I play as a defender, I would know no bounds and fly like a bird to where I belong. And if the ball gets back to my half, I would rush back to my position in lightning speed, crash in with a perfect sliding tackle, steal the ball from the striker's feet and make off for the opponent's goalpost again.

Yes! I have decided. No more dawdling around in the defense, the offence is where its at! The shackles must be broken. I must do what my heart wishes because a true footballer, great of heart, does exactly that. From now on, I would play the dual role of a striker and a defender and show everyone my true mettle. Who knows, the old days might come round again and the story of the doleful defender might be made.....history.

By Syed Sadaf Sultan