

**U.N. AIDS Clock Backdrop to HIV/AIDS Forum**  
**By CLAUDIA WELLINGTON**  
**New York, Sept. 4**

“Every 10 seconds one person is infected with the HIV virus.” This is the solemn message conveyed by the AIDS Clock, an exhibit on loan from the U.N. Population Fund to the SGI-USA in New York for an upcoming HIV/AIDS forum.

As the second hand of the video clock sweeps around, it reveals four scenes of people affected by the disease. Each time it comes full circle, artwork created by an artist with HIV/AIDS appears. The AIDS Clock replays a 13-minute video montage of photographs and artwork arranged in its face. In addition, a bell sounds at 10-second intervals to indicate that another person has contracted the virus.

Marc Westhof, creator of the clock, said he wanted a simple way to show how the disease is affecting us all. When he first conceived the clock, only five people per minute were contracting the virus (thus the four photographs and one piece of original artwork each minute). However, the numbers are steadily increasing — now six people per minute contract the deadly disease.

“I chose the symbol of a clock,” Mr. Westhof says, “because everyone is affected by time and everyone has the potential to be infected with this virus...everyone is a target.”

Prevention and education will be the focus of the HIV/AIDS forum, sponsored by the local Culture Department. “There’s so much shame and misinformation about this virus that people are even afraid to hug,” says Lenny Rosenbluff, forum co-chairperson. “We want to open up a dialogue with members who have contracted this virus...to help take care of them from the standpoint of faith.”

Forum Chairperson Dolly Ramos, who is spearheading the event, has personal experience with AIDS: Her husband died of the disease last year after having been diagnosed with HIV 10 years earlier. He contracted the disease through IV drug use. Ms. Ramos didn’t tell anyone about his condition for more than eight years, because she felt people would push her away and fear her.

SGI President Ikeda’s 1993 speech at Harvard University inspired her to finally speak out about her personal struggles. At that time, Ms. Ramos resolved to do something to educate the members. “We’re not telling people not to have sex,” she says. “We’re not trying to prevent drug abuse. We want to inform people and help them understand that HIV/AIDS can be prevented with knowledge and responsible action.”

The theme of the forum will be “Embracing Hope and Possibilities.” According to Ms. Ramos, this focus was chosen because “there are so many possibilities to prevent HIV/AIDS — you just have to learn about them. For those who already have the virus, we want to offer encouragement. For family and friends of those with HIV/AIDS, we want to help them understand it’s not how you die, it’s how you live before you die.”

The clock will offer a dramatic backdrop for the event. Commissioned by the United Nations in 1995 to dramatize the spread of AIDS, the clock took Mr. Westhof two months and almost \$30,000 to complete. The United Nations had only one requirement for the project: that the exhibit be self-contained. The clock has since traveled to many countries — most recently to the Vancouver AIDS Conference.

The middle portion of the seven-foot clock tower features a large STOP sign, softly lit from the inside. On the tower’s translucent side panels, in both French and English, are statistics relating the spread of the disease.

Etched around the outside of the bottom block are the names of the various artists who contributed to the clock, along with the names of the U.N. organizations involved in the

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international fight against the fatal disease. And behind the tower hangs a colorful banner depicting people involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS, as well as those who have contracted it.

The HIV/AIDS forum will be held Sept. 27, from 10:00 a.m. –6:00 p.m., at the New York Culture Center.

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