



21 July, 2008

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

As many of you may already know, after the Mexico International AIDS Conference I will transition out of my role as GYCA's Program Director to begin a two-year masters degree at the Harvard School of Public Health. It is a bittersweet moment as I look back upon four years of incredible successes, challenges, growth, and innovation.

It seems like just yesterday when youth activists at the Bangkok International AIDS Conference asked me to help them start this global network. From just under 400 members at inception, the network has now grown to over 4,400 members and 500 organizations in over 150 countries worldwide. This year in particular has been the apogee of my years of activism in this field, most notably with the launch of our new Small Grants Program, the merger of our network of youth living with HIV, Living Positively, with Hopes Voice International, our advocacy successes at the UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS high level meetings and our Delegates Briefing on youth living with HIV.

As a Co-Founder of GYCA, my primary impetus for entering into youth HIV activism was my recognition that for all the various endeavors to halt or eradicate the HIV and AIDS epidemic, those best positioned to enact change are the young people working in their communities and countries. Yet they lack the knowledge, skills, and opportunities to channel their energy, interest and enthusiasm into direct action that produces results and can be duplicated and expanded.

Not only are young people the workforce of today and tomorrow— the doctors, politicians, workers, teachers, and mothers— they are also a diverse population with rights and needs that remain drastically unmet despite years of commitments and new initiatives. Through GYCA I believe we have created a platform that empowers youth activists and organizations to take charge of HIV and AIDS prevention, treatment, support and advocacy initiatives to make them relevant, efficient, innovative, and replicable.

Though GYCA began as a simple e-group that reached a privileged few with internet access in hard-hit countries in 2004, we were fortunate to develop our partnership with TakingITGlobal and Global Youth Action network at a time when the advent of more affordable and accessible online networking technology made mass-mobilization possible on a scale we had not witnessed previously. In a truly organic manner, we had created a structure in which young people at the community level were able to dialogue directly with those in possession of the networks, funding, credibility, and human resources. We have also expanded our efforts to supplement our online e-courses and international chat meetings with local trainings, event organizing kits, and networking events by our members, National and Regional Focal Points, and staff.

I am honored to introduce to you GYCA's new Program Director, Rachel Jacobson. Rachel brings to GYCA a rich background in youth leadership, women's rights, and sexual reproductive health. At 24 years old, Rachel has excelled in both a small women's health clinic (Whole Women's Health), a hotline and advocacy organization for pregnant teenagers in Texas (Jane's Due Process), and in a large international NGO as an Associate in Human Rights' Watch Women's Rights Division. As soon as I met Rachel I knew that she would be an enthusiastic, progressive, and committed leader of what has become a powerful constituency that will never shy away from making its demands be heard and fulfilled. I hope that those of you attending the Mexico International AIDS Conference will have a

chance to speak with her. Please visit Rachel's profile to learn about her interests and qualifications: <http://profiles.takingITglobal.org/racheljake>.

As of August 15, I will transition into an advisory role and will continue to assist the Ghana and New York teams on a voluntary basis with fundraising, technology, and outreach. I am pleased that, in the spirit of true youth participation, the GYCA staff team will all be 24 years old and younger beginning this fall. After August 15, I can be reached at joya.banerjee@gmail.com.

There are far too many people thank I could thank in one letter who have been instrumental to GYCA's success and to my own personal development. I would particularly like to thank the following people for your advice, support, generosity, understanding and tough love when I needed it: Mila Gorokhovich, Christian Gladel, Peter Piot, Julitta Onabanjo, Mary Otieno, Rick Olson, Bruce Dick, Steve Kraus, Diane Widdus, Yara Ghossein, Edwin Nichols, Alex McClelland, Mirlande Demers, Marco Gomes, Vikram Laishram, Naina Dhingra, Beth Pellettieri, Prateek Suman, and all of my staff, colleagues, partners, teachers and friends in the movement.

It has been a pleasure and an honor to meet so many of you; I have been humbled and enriched by your experiences, your tragedies, your hopes, your passions and your dreams. I thank all of you for your continued participation in GYCA, for your contributions, donations, patience in times of need and doubt, and words of kindness and encouragement. It has been a blessing to be a part of this collective dream and to see the network blossom into fruition due to the efforts of literally thousands of people all over the world.

Yours truly,



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