

**"The Past, Present, and Future of Youth Involvement"**  
**Future Perspective**  
**Washington, D.C.**  
**December 3, 2002**

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NAINA DHINGRA: Good morning. Thank you all for being here. Thanks Hally for that very, very nice introduction. I have to say that I was very excited to be asked to do this because I was always told, Naina, put your feet back on the ground, you know come back to reality a little bit. I'm a very big vision person, so to be asked to come and basically give a presentation on your vision is, doesn't necessarily happen to often, so thank you, Hally, thanks to you Dennett [Misspelled?]. This is very exciting to see how many people are really interested in pursuing this idea of youth involvement. My name is Naina Dhingra. I work at Advocates for Youth in the Department of Public Affairs, where I coordinate our International Youth Leadership Council and this past summer, I was working in the International Department where Advocates and YouthNet worked on this entity called the Barcelona Youth Force which you've heard about, you'll continue to hear about because it truly is a model of youth-adult partnership. I want to start out by asking you to think about what do we mean by youth involvement? We've heard so many different definitions and I thought that I would kind of share with you what I think that youth involvement, what we really mean and to begin with, it really is a state of mind. It's a very different way of thinking and I know as more people start to get involved with this, everybody wants the tool kit. You know how do we do it, check off the box, are these the little indicators? How do we

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do it? I don't think really think there's a right formula, it's just, it's really challenging yourself to think a little bit differently. Partnership first involvement, I stand here before you today truly as a product of youth-adult partnership. From the age I was 14, I was working with community-based groups doing peer education with adults who took the time to partner with me. Not just to involve me, but to truly partner with me. When we talk about youth involvement that sometimes negates the fact that there's a lot of already, incredible youth leadership going on and youth run, youth founded organizations. So, what does involvement mean if there's already youth-led organizations, then we need to talk about partnership because there's an incredible role that needs to be played for these youth founded organizations. They need adults, and I'm speaking very much on, I work with a student run organization called The Student Global AIDS Campaign, which is a national network of students on about 200 college campuses and we are having this really hard time right now because all the leadership who's been running it for the past two years, we are all graduating. We are not going to be students anymore. We really need the assistance of adults to help us through that transition, of people who know how to do it and lastly, as it was mentioned it's a riot, the 1.2 billion people in the world have a right to be involved. Levels of involvement and partnership, now I know there are a lot of different terminologies used when

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people talk about levels. I don't mean, you know, the eight levels, the ladder, I don't really mean it like that, I mean, in terms of this presentation, what I want you to think about is these three ways of youth involvement, because a lot of times, in this field, in adolescent sexual and reproductive health, we only think about youth involvement on the programmatic, on the ground level and that's only... you're only getting a little piece of the puzzle, so I'm going to talk about three levels, on the ground, programmatic, in the home office or at your headquarters and in policy and decision-making on the ground. I already started out, this whole idea of more support for youth founded organizations. The first thing an organization has to do when they enter a new country, is find out what young people are already there. I always this thing, oh we can't find young people, we don't them. We don't know where they are. I guarantee you, any place that you want to go, there is probably a youth group there, probably and AIDS prevention group, particularly in developing countries. We even talked a little bit about the U.N. General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS, which I had the opportunity to attend and I was incredibly amazed. UNICEF had supported about 22 young people to come and most of them had all started their own organizations. They were doing incredible, incredible work on the ground, but other people, you know UNICEF had found them, but they're in places that probably a lot of your organizations

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already are. So that's the first thing, so instead of coming in and starting an entire program, go to those groups, find out what they need. Support them and then that's going to create such an incredible program that includes youth from the start to finish. Youth employment. We can't talk about HIV prevention without talking about youth employment and I so often here again, what can we do, well what else can we do to get around that. You know, we don't have the funding, there's not enough money. People don't see it as a priority. It has to be a priority; there is just no two ways about it. It has to be made a priority. HIV/AIDS peer educators, they need to be, that is a form of employment, it really is. When I was a peer educator in high school, I even got a stipend over here. I didn't really need a stipend, not at all. You know, I was very fortunate, I come... I grew up in suburban Connecticut. I don't really need a stipend like that, but if peer educators here are able to get stipends, then why isn't there the money to give educators in developing countries stipends? When they are the ones who need it much more than a person like I did. Capacity building: youth involvement, youth-adult partnership, it's... like I said, it's a whole state of mind. You can't really use a tool kit, so we need to be able to give the organizations the tools that they need. There are organizations doing incredible work on this. UNICEF and a lot of, especially when we are here, based in the United States, there already incredible domestic groups doing

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this work and we need to look at the domestic, the United States programs and say, okay how are they doing it. How have they been able to be successful, because there are a lot of very small community-based groups who have been talking about youth involvement and doing partnership forever, but just because we don't hear them, doesn't mean they are not there. Moving on to the home office, I posed a couple of questions up here. I hope that, I'm just trying to get you to think a little bit. How do you involve youth in your office? What kind of internship program do you have? Do you include your interns in program development? Are there any young people on your Board of Directors, or TAG, or advisory committee or whatever that entity might be for your organization. Almost, I'm sure that almost every one of your offices has young people; except you might not really think of them as young people cause they're just the intern. I don't know if any of you brought your interns with you here today. I hope that some of you did, because your interns are young people and sometimes people forget that, because their input and their ideas is just as valuable as any other young person, whether they have been working with you or not and if they are interning with you, that means that they have interest in this, so think of your interns more of a resource, instead of that person who just does photocopying once in a while. Internship programs, particularly the YouthNet, the YouthNet Internship Program.

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That's really a model. The way that six young people were brought in and now two of them are staff members there and they've moved on to doing really incredible things. How are you really working to make sure that you have a youth presence, a youth voice in your office all the time, young people on your Board of Directors, your TAG, your advisory committee. YouthNet has four youths on their TAG, that's incredible, that is really, really incredible. Advocates for Youth recently cited that they were going to have six young people on their Board of Directors and finally, after a transitions, it's happened, and people are saying, yes this does add value. In policy decision-making... oh this is a great picture from, all the pictures are from Barcelona, also. In policy and decision-making: From the very beginning, developing grant proposals. I touched on this a little bit in the beginning. When you are thinking about entering a country, how do you enter? Do you go... do you make the program in the D.C. office based on something else, or is it made with the input of the people it's supposed to affect in those countries? Have you done a clear assessment of what young people are there? What programs are reaching them and how they're taking care of themselves? What are they doing to protect themselves? To really involving them in the whole development of the grant proposal, in terms of finding out what makes the most sense. International conferences: When we think about these International conferences, recently, of course,

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there was the Barcelona Youth Conference, which was absolutely incredible because... there's a picture of us with Sandy Thurman [Misspelled?] and Peter Pia [Misspelled?]. You know, we were with first ladies, under Secretary Generals of the United Nations. It was, I mean it was a little ridiculous to be honest... you know all these young people and these high-up people and it was wonderful, but the real issue is, we have their support, we really do, but what we don't have enough support of is people like you. It's the NGO community. That's where we need the support. When I was at the U.N. session on HIV/AIDS, Advocates for Youth decided that instead of sending their Executive Director, they would send their Director of Public Affairs and three young people and we actually were there, we staged a protest against the U.N. that there weren't enough young people as official delegates with a bunch of the other young people who were there and we were able to have a lot of good conversations, particularly with the U.S. Government people and whatever else, but what we found is that we were better received by Government Officials than by our own NGO community members. So, when I say it's really a change in your state-of-mind, it really is, because when I came back, that was the thing that I was most shocked about, is that I felt more disenfranchised by NGO members than by government. It was really sad, I thought. Young people as official delegates, again as Board members and on the TAG, so really, there really

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is a lot of different places that young people can be involved in decision-making and one last word on conferences. I think we sometimes get a little... we get very excited about these International conferences, whether they be the U.N. ones, or the International AIDS ones and yes, for that moment, it makes a really big difference, or as so in our minds it does, but we really have to think, like how much of a difference is this making on the programmatic level and are we focusing... how much energy are we really focusing. Are we just focusing so much on these conferences that we are forgetting what's going on, on the programmatic level. So, we really have to make sure there is a balance because these conferences, sometimes, they sometimes can get our minds off track of thinking. Those sorts of things, you know, like I said, we thought that we were... we were making a big impact because we could get all these incredible people behind us, but is it truly reaching the people who have to take it back on the ground level and I think that that's what later today, we will really discuss, what kind of impact did that really make? So, to close, what kind of themes that I hope you will think about is this idea of really, truly being a state-of-mind, just a different way of thinking, involvement for a partnership, what's the difference? Are you only thinking about involvement or are you thinking about, how can you support young people who have already demonstrated their leadership capabilities. Challenging oneself and this

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idea of translating involvement in partnership to every level, not beyond the programmatic level. Thank you so much for having me and I look forward to... I'm sure that we'll have some great debate and discussion later on in the afternoon and thank you so much for being here.