



STORIES of HOPE

ZAMBIA

Men in Uniform Fight HIV/AIDS



A PEPFAR-supported Zambian Defense Force drama troupe performs a skit on HIV prevention.

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The U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (Emergency Plan/PEPFAR) is committed to working in partnership with Ministries of Defense to fight HIV/AIDS. In Zambia, approximately 17 percent of the population was living with HIV/AIDS in 2005,¹ with members of the military considered to be at high-risk for HIV infection.

To help prevent the spread of HIV in the Zambian Defense Force, the Emergency Plan supports two Defense Force drama troops that travel to military units with HIV prevention messages for soldiers and their families. Drama troops use behavior change communication strategies to reach audiences with culturally-appropriate HIV prevention messages. Song, drama, poetry and dance performances encourage abstinence, faithfulness and the correct and consistent use of condoms.

One drama troupe member explained, "To the soldiers, drama and the performance are like a mirror, and soldiers are able to look at their lives through the plays that we present." In particular, the performances help soldiers to consider the factors that put them at risk for HIV infection. Lt. Col. Banda noted, "As a soldier, first of all, we are trained to take risks. And, we live in a society where we are always in groups. So, it's very easy for peer pressures (sic)."

Military members leave the performances with life-saving information about HIV prevention. As one drama troupe member explained, "I want the soldiers to actually walk away with the message that abstinence, self control and discipline at all levels is most cardinal. ... It's the biggest battle that is before mankind." Soldiers also leave the performances with informational materials on HIV/AIDS, including resources on HIV prevention, stigma reduction, HIV counseling and testing, and antiretroviral treatment. Since 2003, the drama troops have visited the 69 Zambia Defense Forces facilities throughout the country.

¹ UNAIDS, Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic, 2006.

The U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

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Office of the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator
www.PEPFAR.gov | SGAC_Public_Affairs@state.gov