Welcome to the first edition of the BONELA Guardian! A newsletter designed to keep you informed and in touch with BONELA, and with the human rights dimension of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the Guardian will be distributed quarterly through our mailing list.

And there is a lot of news to share. With the addition of two new board members, two new staff members, and three volunteers, BONELA has seen dramatic change over 2003.

We were pleased to welcome two new members to the BONELA Board earlier this year. Patrick Changeta of the Botswana Federation of Trade Unions (BFTU) and Kenole Leinatsela of Molepawojaang Support Group join Chairperson Martin Mosima (IDM), Vice-Chair Tiny Masupe (GMT Surgery), Gloria Jacques (UB), and Maame Awuah (Awuah, Khan & Partners) in providing guidance and direction to the organization.

BONELA's long-time Executive Director, Christine Stegling, was joined in May by Tebogo Ngwakomonye as administrative assistant. Programme Officer Millikani Ndaba followed in July, and has taken over educational outreach programmes for the organization, including our fledgling human rights and HIV/AIDS training manual.

September brought development volunteer Koreen Reece to the organization from Human Rights Internet (HRI) in Canada. She has been involved in membership development and general programme support, and will be with us until March of next year.

Banyana Seoromeng joined BONELA as an IT volunteer in October of this year. Banyana has been updating and redesigning the BONELA website. For up-to-date news on BONELA activities and events, and for easy-to-access copies of BONELA publications wherever you are, visit us at www.bonela.botsnet.co.bw. Also in October, Elizabeth Maxwell came on board as a part-time legal resource and research volunteer. A law school graduate from the United States, Elizabeth is currently assisting the Lawyers’ Task Force in identifying potential precedent-setting cases to pursue.

An additional development volunteer will be joining BONELA in January, from World University Services of Canada (WUSC). Kristi Kenyon will be involved in the development of our human rights and HIV/AIDS training manual, as well as other ongoing BONELA projects. She plans to be with us for two years.

BONELA welcomes the expertise and energy of its new board members, staff members and volunteers. We all look forward to serving you, and the human rights interest of people living with HIV/AIDS throughout Botswana, in 2004!

THE BONELA ROUNDUP

- The National AIDS Council’s Ethics, Law, and Human Rights sector, housed at BONELA, is currently finalizing a strategic plan to ensure a strong role for human rights in future government policy decisions.

- The Community Advisory Board for the HIV vaccination trial in Gaborone is regularly attended by the Director of the organization.

- The Lawyers’ Taskforce held a seminar on Routine versus Compulsory Testing in September (see p.2), and is working to ensure that the principle of informed consent is reflected in emerging government policy on routine HIV testing. The Taskforce has also undertaken an additional project involving prisoners’ rights.

Also watch for a human rights and HIV/AIDS training manual, media campaign, and related IEC material to come out of BONELA in 2004.
ROUTINE VS. COMPULSORY TESTING: A VERDICT?

As of the 1st of January, 2004, health care providers in Botswana will offer routine HIV testing to all patients who visit public health facilities.

The move comes as part of a wider strategy by Botswana’s health authorities to destigmatize HIV and HIV testing – thereby reaching more people at an earlier stage of infection, and availing necessary services to as many people as possible.

BONELA and the Botswana Lawyers’ Taskforce on HIV/AIDS agree with such a strategy, in principle. However, it is crucial that the proposed testing process is consistent with a rights-based approach.

We must ensure, for example, the patient’s right to autonomy (control over one’s own body), and his or her right to privacy. Protecting and respecting these rights is imperative considering the stigma attached to HIV infection, and the resultant discrimination experienced by many who are infected in Botswana.

Patients must feel safe and confident that entering a public health facility will not strip them of such basic human rights – otherwise, they simply will not go.

In September, BONELA and the Lawyers’ Taskforce organized a discussion seminar to clarify the issue of routine testing, and to help map a way forward for policy development. The seminar brought together over seventy people from legal, medical, academic and civil society backgrounds.

After a vibrant debate, considering HIV testing from a multitude of perspectives, seminar participants agreed that routine testing for HIV was feasible – provided that the informed consent of the patient was obtained first. Only with such explicit consent, they decided, can routine HIV testing respect patients’ basic rights.

Seminar participants also stressed a need for stakeholders – including the public – to share an understanding that routine testing is not equivalent to compulsory testing.

The seminar’s recommendations were submitted to the National AIDS Council during its special session on routine testing in October, to inform the drafting of a comprehensive policy on routine testing.

BONELA and the Lawyers’ Taskforce on HIV/AIDS remain committed to monitoring the introduction of routine testing in our health facilities, and to ensuring that patients fully understand the choices they make as part of their visits to clinics and hospitals.

To read the official report on the Routine versus Compulsory Testing Seminar, visit the BONELA website.

Christine Stegling has been BONELA’s Executive Director since the organization’s inception. She represents the organization to the National AIDS Council, which is currently determining government HIV testing policy.

BONELA ON THE ROAD

The past three months have been a busy time for BONELA, with invitations to HIV/AIDS fairs, workshops, and conferences across the country.

During October and November, BONELA had the opportunity to attend two HIV/AIDS health fairs – the first in Masunga (Oct. 10th-11th), and the second in Ghanzi (Nov. 14th-15th). Both were organized by their local District Multisectoral AIDS Committees, and were well-attended by members of the community, local schools, health professionals, teachers, support group members, and representatives from other HIV/AIDS organizations.

BONELA provided an information stall at each of the fairs, distributing publications and engaging participants in meaningful discussion around HIV/AIDS, the law, and human rights.

BONELA also conducted workshops on both occasions, allowing for more in-depth discussion of such issues as fighting stigma and discrimination, gaps in legislation related to HIV/AIDS, and legal and ethical dilemmas that arise for those infected or affected by the virus.

The health fairs provided BONELA with an ideal opportunity for effective community outreach, while at the same time giving us a better sense of the situations and needs of those we seek to represent. We look forward to participating in more health fairs in the coming year.

Also in November, BONELA was invited to a support group-organized workshop in Lobatse.

The lively discussion that followed proved fruitful for us, and for participants. We hope to offer more such education and training programmes directly to support groups in 2004, and look forward to learning from support group members about how best to protect and advance their rights.

On the capacity-building front, BONELA attended the BO-CONGO NGO week in Lerala from October 20th to 23rd. Participant organizations ran public information stalls and joined panel discussions organized around the theme of “Strengthening NGO - Community Partnership”. There was a keen interest in BONELA’s activities from members of the Lerala community and the other 30 CBOs and NGOs represented. The week’s programme also included informative visits to local CBOs Kgetsi ya Tse and Moremi Conservation Reserve.

For more up-to-date information on where we are and where we’ve been, visit the BONELA website.
Francistown was abuzz from Nov. 28th to Dec. 1st, when it played host to both the Botswana Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS' (BONEPWA+) Second National Conference for PLWHAs, and the National Commemoration of World AIDS Day. BONELA was at both events.

The Conference, held at Mater Spei College, drew over three hundred delegates from support groups around Botswana, and over fifty speakers from an equally wide variety of places and disciplines. Organized around the twin themes of care & support and human rights, the Conference incorporated topics of interest ranging from HIV and nutrition to ARV adherence, from income-generation to spiritual healing. With sessions held in both English and Setswana, the conference gave delegates an ideal opportunity to fill vital information gaps and share ways of living positively with one another.

BONELA chaired the conference’s human rights plenary session, at which Justice Marumo (Francistown High Court) acted as keynote speaker. The topic proved relevant and popular among delegates, who were eager to participate in BONELA’s human rights and HIV/AIDS workshop later in the day. The limited-registration, all-day session was ultimately oversubscribed, with forty-five support group representatives participating.

BONELA was also heavily involved in the conceptualization and organization of the conference, and staff played important hands-on roles through all three days of the event. We were pleased to offer our support to BONEPWA+’s initiative, and to see so many people living with HIV/AIDS brought together in such a spirit of community, learning, and positive living.

For more information on the Conference, contact BONEPWA+ at 319-0972.

UB’s SEGMENTATION STUDY: BACK TO SCHOOL

During 2003, members of the University of Botswana community underwent a segmentation pilot study designed to determine best practice for addressing the HIV/AIDS situation on campus. Eight hundred questionnaires and 100 face-to-face interviews were administered – mostly to students – by The Monitor Group consultants.

The results have identified and provided new insight into nine social ‘segments’ on campus, descriptively nicknamed The Party Boys, The Casanovas, New in Love, Savvy Girls, New on the Scene, No Sex Please, Safe in Love, Lonely, and Seriously Married. Each nickname profiles a group ‘personality’ identified by the assessors, and suggests the nature of the response required to meet the group’s particular needs.

And tailored responses are clearly required. Across the board, statistics revealed that a significant proportion of men and women have had sex while drunk in the past twelve months, and that many of those in steady relationships had not used condoms – even though several reported simultaneous casual relationships.

Moreover, while respondents forecast an average 50% risk of contracting HIV for members of society as a whole, they considered themselves and their friends to have just a 14% chance of infection.

These are disturbing results, indicating a general failure to personalize risk and suggesting that even high levels of HIV/AIDS awareness do not guarantee appropriate behaviour change.

In response to these results, three of the segments – The Party Boys, New on the Scene, and Safe in Love – have been selected by assessors as priority areas for behaviour change intervention. Business plans for programmes to address their specific needs in relation to HIV education and prevention have been formulated, and are awaiting final acceptance by University management before implementation.

Suggested strategies include controlling entry to campus, with particular reference to so-called “sugar daddies” who target New on the Scene female students by offering them gifts in exchange for sex. Other proposals include alcohol-free social facilities (such as a sports café) on campus; spot checks for condoms with incentives to carry them at all times; mentoring programmes; and the integration of testing into other health services.

More holistically, respondents noted a fundamental need to break the silence around HIV/AIDS on campus, and to make safe sex an attractive and socially acceptable option.

Plans to conduct a similar segmentation research exercise with the general public are now underway. Researchers believe that many of the current messages and programmes attempting to address issues around HIV/AIDS target only a small proportion of the general population. They hope that a segmentation study on a large scale would help to remedy this oversight.

Information from such a study could also pave the way for serious efforts to change perception and behaviour in relation to HIV/AIDS – particularly in more remote areas, where traditional beliefs might otherwise act as stumbling blocks to creating a risk free, enabling environment.

Members of the assessment team have already visited Maun, and are hopeful that a segmentation study there will prove a success.

For more information on the segmentation study, contact UB’s Health and Wellness Centre.

Results of the study indicate a general failure to personalize risk – suggesting that even high levels of HIV/AIDS awareness do not guarantee appropriate behaviour change.

Gloria Jacques is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Social Work at the University of Botswana. She has been a member of the BONELA Board since its inception.

The ‘Safe in Love’ segment of the University community is among the groups targeted for upcoming behaviour change intervention programmes.
The Botswana Network on Ethics, Law, and HIV/AIDS (BONELA) is a non-governmental organization committed to integrating an ethical, legal, and human rights approach into Botswana’s response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Through training and education, research, advocacy, and litigation, BONELA strives to promote the destigmatisation of HIV/AIDS and to prevent discrimination against those who are infected. In so doing, we hope to create an enabling and just environment for those either infected or affected by HIV/AIDS.

Interested in becoming a member of BONELA?
We welcome members from the legal community, academia, community-based organizations, and public and private sectors, as well as people living with HIV/AIDS and concerned individuals. Contact the secretariat for your membership application form today!

FROM THE DIRECTOR’S DESK

The year 2003 has been a challenging and eventful one for BONELA. Many of the programmes and initiatives we started in 2002 have been followed-up or intensified. Some have resulted in exciting new developments, including the Lawyers’ Taskforce on HIV/AIDS and the Draft Bill on Employment and HIV.

We have also managed to work with more diverse communities in and, more importantly, outside of Gaborone. This year we have held meetings and workshops in Ghanzi, Francistown, Masungu, Lobatse and Lerela, to name a few. All our efforts were made possible by the fact that the secretariat was strengthened by new staff members and a number of volunteers, all of whom have made a great contribution to our activities.

The year 2004 will see a more concerted effort by the secretariat to finalize a training manual on HIV and human rights, and to initiate training at as many institutions and organisations as possible. We also hope that next year we will be able to undertake a long-planned legislative review, which will mark the first step for drafting protective legislation with regard to HIV/AIDS.

We at the secretariat have been encouraged and motivated by the positive response to our activities this year, and we hope to sustain the momentum. We would like to thank all of you who have shown a keen interest in what we are doing, or have supported us over the year.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all BONELA staff, volunteers and partners for their hard work and support during this year. In particular, I would like to thank the board for their sustained commitment and tireless effort throughout 2003.

I wish you all a peaceful and happy Christmas, and am looking forward to working with you in 2004.

Yours,
Christine Stegling

Season’s Greetings
and all the best for a
HAPPY and PROSPEROUS
2004
masego le matlhogonela e ngwagela o moshel!