

To whom it may concern at IRIN

Ref: Article on web site <http://www.irinnews.org>
Ethiopia 'Flower Industry needs to nip HIV in the bud'

On behalf of the Ethiopian Horticulture Producers and Exporters Association, EHPEA, that is the Association set up to represent the Flower Export Sector, I would like to comment on this article as follows:

The views expressed by the Employer interviewed are not representative of the sector as a whole and the article does not give credit to the sector for the actions that it is undertaking in response to the very real threat that HIV/AIDS infection poses to the Sector in particular and Ethiopia in general.

It is also noteworthy that the Employer interviewed is one of the few who is not a member of the Association.

The Association is well aware of the impact of HIV/AIDS on the Sector in neighbouring countries where infection rates are already much higher. In these countries, the Sector incurs significant difficulties due to the loss of skilled personnel at all levels and loss of productivity as a direct or indirect result of HIV infection and the associated illnesses. This places a considerable strain on the management and finances of companies and is a great personal tragedy to the families involved.

In order to try to prevent these problems occurring here in Ethiopia, The Association is already taking positive steps to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS on all member farms and to encourage responsible sexual behaviour amongst all employees.

Activities undertaken and being planned by the Association include:

- Implementation of a programme of AIDS Awareness Training on a number of farms in the Sebeta area.
The Association has signed a memorandum of understanding with Kulich, a local NGO specialising in Aids awareness and reproductive health training for young adults. This organisation has installed audio equipment into a number of work areas on the participating farms to brief staff on the potential dangers of irresponsible sexual behaviour and has trained a number of Peer Educators /Youth Leaders on each farm to give advice to employees after the audio briefing. The programme is now being extended to the Holeta area and it is hoped to reach all member farm within the next 12 months.
- Implementation of the Industry Code of Practice
Development of this Code of Practice is an industry initiative designed to promote good agricultural practice, protection of the environment and corporate social responsibility on all member farms. The Code is to be launched in June of this

year and all members of the Association will be given one year in which to implement all the components of the Bronze Level of the standard. Included in this Code at the Bronze Level, is the requirement for all farms to implement an active programme of HIV/AIDS awareness training for all employees.

As you are no doubt aware Flower production for export is a very new industry in Ethiopia, currently employing +/- 30,000 people, and having an estimated earnings of \$ 60 million per year. This means that the industry is of tremendous value to the country.

Government interest in and support for the Sector has facilitated the phenomenal growth of the sector in the last three years and both the Association and the Government are aware of the need to meet international market and Civil Society standards and expectations. The Code of Practice is being introduced to guide the Sector in how to meet these standards and you can be assured that both the Government and the Association working in partnership with local stakeholders are fully committed to ensuring that the Code is implemented in all Flower export farms in Ethiopia.

I hope that this short explanation of some of the activities undertaken by EHPEA helps to give a more positive view of the response of the Export Flower Sector to the very real threat posed by HIV/AIDS in the future and that you will be able to include in your web site details of the efforts being made by the Sector to combat this threat.

Should you require further details please do not hesitate to contact me at the Association.

Yours sincerely

Tsegaye Abebe
Chairman EHPEA