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**4th IAS Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and
Prevention
Newsmaker Interviews
Maura Elaripe
International AIDS Society
and Australasian Society for HIV Medicine
July 22, 2007**

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JILL BRADEN BALDERAS: Maura Elaripe, vice president of Igat Hope in Papua New Guinea, thanks for joining us today. Tell me about your organization, Igat Hope, and what you do for HIV-positive people and those living with AIDS in Papua New Guinea.

MAURA ELARIPE: Our organization, Igat Hope, our main objective is to create one united voice for people affected and infected by HIV in Papua New Guinea and also to lobby the government against stigma and discrimination [inaudible] public. That is our objective, to eliminate stigma and discrimination in Papua New Guinea.

JILL BRADEN BALDERAS: What are some of the issues facing people who are living with HIV and AIDS in Papua New Guinea?

MAURA ELARIPE: The issues that we face in our day-to-day lives, having to access basic services like medicine, ART, opportunistic infections, treatments for opportunistic infections and nutrition, like in the main, like a town, but mostly [inaudible] so having to live in [Inaudible] we can [inaudible] because it is a city and everyone has to live, you know, by this so mostly people who are not employed who don't have a paid job find it so hard and it is a lot of challenges

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that they face because we don't have social security measures in place.

JILL BRADEN BALDERAS: Now, you also mentioned stigma. What are some of the issues surrounding stigma there?

MAURA ELARIPE: Stigma in terms of having to come forward and access treatment, like most are scared, because confidential it is not guaranteed at the hospitals, clinics, some clinics that they go to. When someone is tested positive, the information leaks out and that is one thing that we don't want to see happen.

JILL BRADEN BALDERAS: Now, you mentioned in your keynote presentation what you called greater involvement of positive people, so at a conference like this, how do you see that principle being acted out?

MAURA ELARIPE: I would like to see - that principle acted out in a conference like this would be to have positive people involved in, getting involved not only [inaudible] or have programs that are specifically have positive people's in [inaudible] head or you know the challenges that they go through and what successes they have had, you know, these kind of things are important that we should hear. But every single thing that we didn't provide that platform, though we had some community, we tried our best to involve the community.

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JILL BRADEN BALDERAS: What are some examples of how the community was involved in this meeting?

MAURA ELARIPE: Through our programs, like taking them out to see what the Australia's responses like the HIV clinics or the support services they have in place and we had some other activities like the welcoming session where we invited the community to come along and feel part of it and the satellite program were as to talk about how we see ourselves in the next 10 years. So these are some of the programs and also the positive launch of some of the activities that the community initiated.

JILL BRADEN BALDERAS: Now, I read a statistic that about half of Papua New Guinea's doctors work outside of the country. You are a nurse by training, so you obviously know what the health system is like there and it's probably somewhat comparable to other places where the epidemic is really big. Talk about the importance of addressing the health care workers issues in places where HIV/AIDS is a difficult problem.

MAURA ELARIPE: The problem is with the management, you know, of department. I mean, the management, if they are not doing their work, how can the people in the field at ground level do their work? So, people are moving there because simple things like gloves, if they run out, it takes them two to three months to get and that is not good enough so if that

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is [inaudible] then what if it is going to happen to them [inaudible] if we run out today, it is going to take them another three months for them to order. So these are the kind of things and doctors don't go away because some doctors, some people who are already in a management system and who have been in the management have worked long years and they have been working a lot of time and it is about time some of them stepped down and gave the position to people who are young, people who are good waiting and coming up to get the system going. But then it is kind of like, it is all about power and you know, it's all mixed with political things that, it is just crazy.

JILL BRADEN BALDERAS: So I have heard some people here at the conference say that the health care workers issue is one of the number one issues that is facing the fight against HIV/AIDS. Would you agree to that?

MAURA ELARIPE: Yes, I will agree with that as well, because we need health care workers to monitor us, to treat us when we go to hospitals and it is their work and also they are the ones who are exposed to being infected so having to protect them is also a priority that the Ministry of Health or Department of Health has to take seriously like gloves, simple tips like gloves, it is a big thing today as we wouldn't want our nurses and doctors to be infected so I think taking care of the health care workers is also a very important thing.

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JILL BRADEN BALDERAS: Now, in many parts of the world, women represent the majority of HIV cases and as a woman living with HIV, what advice would you give women? What encouragement would you give women who are either vulnerable to HIV or actually are already infected?

MAURA ELARIPE: To women who are already living with HIV, my advice is that there is, I mean at the end of every stone there is always a rainbow and we may feel sad today but tomorrow is another day that will maybe challenge us ahead but there may be good things happening so I mean HIV is not the end of the world. I have felt that 10 years a day but now I look at my life as a totally different way.

JILL BRADEN BALDERAS: You just mentioned that you found out your diagnosis 10 years ago. At that time, did you think you would be alive today, able to address thousands of people at a keynote scientific conference and furthermore representing the millions of people who are HIV positive around the world?

MAURA ELARIPE: I was diagnosed in 1997 and the doctors told me that I wouldn't live to see the new millennium. The doctor predicted and told me, you will not see 2000. And so I said, what makes you think that? And he said, because you are going to die. And I said, well, I am going to prove you wrong.

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When I was first diagnosed, everything came to a stop, like I felt that my world was just, I was nothing, I was nobody, like I said what is this lesson and that lesson degree that I have, what good is it to me? I am already infected with HIV. I am not going to be allowed to practice it. So, and then when I became so sick, when the doctor said that, it made me so angry and I said, how can you predict my death? How could you predict me dying like that? Well, I am going to prove you wrong that I am not going to die and I am going to live to see the next 10 years and I never realized that I will be coming this far, coming, you know, talking at international conferences like this one, like when I look back, it was kind of a huge step that I had taken and it also really, it just boost my self esteem as well as making me confident and also I can talk openly about things which I feel that is not right.

JILL BRADEN BALDERAS: Last question, you explained in your keynote that your organization, I gat Hope, means there is hope. So, to you what does a hopeful future look like for the fight against HIV/AIDS?

MAURA ELARIPE: I have this hope that there will be a cure and that is the hope that I cling to. I take my drugs every day but I always hope that one day, one fine day, there will be a cure so that is the hope that I cling to and I hope that [inaudible] will be different when I gat Hope, when we

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reach out to all the other provinces and I can see the positive people coming together trying to make a difference in our health system and all [inaudible] becoming more different.

JILL BRADEN BALDERAS: Well, Maura Elaripe, vice president of Igat Hope, thank you for joining us today.

MAURA ELARIPE: Thank you.

[END RECORDING]