



## PRESS RELEASE

17 August 2017

### Our youth will be the generation to end AIDS, says Charlize Theron

*Young women and girls account for 75% of new HIV infections among adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa*

**Wednesday, 16 August 2017** – Academy Award winning-actress and U.N. Messenger of Peace, Charlize Theron welcomed media in Klieptown, Johannesburg for an interactive experience at a Choma Dreams Café, an innovative project targeting young women and girls. The event was hosted by the Charlize Theron Africa Outreach Project (CTAOP) and [HIVSA](#), one of its community-based partners.

HIVSA's Choma Dreams Café project consists of internet-connected youth hubs designed to provide young women with HIV prevention and social asset building programmes in a safe, fun, adolescent-friendly way.

The project is implemented by the non-profit organization, HIVSA, and funded by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and CTAOP through the DREAMS Innovation Challenge – a key component of the broader DREAMS partnership, which aims to reduce HIV infections among adolescent girls and young women across 10 sub-Saharan African countries by keeping them determined, resilient, empowered, AIDS-free, mentored, and safe (DREAMS).

Managed on behalf of PEPFAR by JSI Research & Training Institute Inc., the Innovation Challenge aims to infuse new solutions for addressing the complex needs of adolescent girls and young women.

CTAOP's mission is to invest in African youth to keep themselves safe from HIV/AIDS. This is achieved by providing funding and other resources to community-based, African organisations that use innovative ways to engage youth and empower them to keep themselves and their peers safe from the virus. CTAOP and HIVSA's partnership started in 2013 and has focused particularly on adolescent girls.

It was recently reported that the total number of people living with HIV in South Africa increased significantly from an estimated 4.3 million in 2002 to 7.1 million by 2016. It was also revealed that approximately one-fifth of South African women in their reproductive ages are HIV-positive<sup>1</sup>, which shows the alarming rate at which girls are becoming infected.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/>

Determined

Resilient

Empowered

AIDS-Free

Mentored

Safe



Theron has long been recognised for her efforts in raising awareness and dedicating resources to addressing the epidemic in South Africa. She says, “I have always had a genuine interest in understanding the challenges South African youth face and what is being done to ensure the next generation can succeed in keeping themselves safe. Listening to the youth and seeing the amazing work they are doing in their own communities inspires me and gives me confidence that the future is bright and that we need to invest more in health and support systems for young people.”

Coupled with South Africa having the largest HIV epidemic profile in the world, Theron’s passion to make a real difference fighting HIV in her home country led to her launching CTAOP ten years ago.

Theron believes that today’s youth will be the generation to end AIDS, but they remain one of the most affected demographics as they face a number of challenges that inhibit their ability to stay safe from the virus. “The young people I meet are inspirational. They are driven, resourceful, and want to be heard. We absolutely must bring them into the room, and into the conversation,” she says.

The partnership between CTAOP, HIVSA, and PEPFAR serves as an example of how collaboration is achieving significant results through strengthened social and structural support systems for youth. In 2013, CTAOP worked with HIVSA to establish the successful online magazine Choma, which has reached over 1 million adolescent girls and young women and is aimed at empowering them to remain HIV free. In 2016, this project then expanded to the development of the Choma Dreams Cafés under the DREAMS Innovation Challenge, supported by PEPFAR and CTAOP.

To date, 30 Choma Dreams Cafés have been rolled out by HIVSA with the intention of handing over the balance to community organisations and schools in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal over the next two months.

“To impact young women and to empower them to be the HIV-free future, we needed to think differently about how we approach and engage, which is where the idea of Choma and the Choma Dreams Café was born,” says CEO of HIVSA, Jean Armstrong. “So far, we have seen some great progress as girls have embraced the Choma Dreams Café as a safe and empowering space.”

Ambassador Deborah L. Birx, M.D., U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator and Special Representative for Global Health Diplomacy, adds, “PEPFAR is proud to partner with the Charlize Theron Africa Outreach Project and HIVSA to empower, support, and protect adolescent girls and young women from HIV and violence. Community-based approaches, such as the Choma DREAMS Cafés, are helping create safe spaces for vulnerable girls in South Africa. We are deeply committed, including through our DREAMS Innovation Challenge, to building an AIDS-free future for adolescent girls and young women.”

Although there is a long road ahead, CTAOP and HIVSA are making good progress. “AIDS is the leading cause of death among females between the ages of 15 and 49 globally. We hope that we can reverse this trend by continuing to improve support systems, provide comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education, teach the skills needed to overcome daily challenges, and become tomorrow’s leaders. With the right investment, young women and girls in South Africa can and will be able to keep themselves safe from this deadly virus,” Theron concludes.

For more information about the Charlize Theron Africa Outreach Project, visit [www.charlizeafricaoutreach.org](http://www.charlizeafricaoutreach.org) or follow the CTAOP journey on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#). To learn more about HIVSA visit [www.hivsa.com](http://www.hivsa.com) or follow the CHOMA journey on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). For more information about the DREAMS Innovation Challenge, visit <https://www.pepfar.gov/partnerships/ppp/dreams> and follow @DREAMSChallenge on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).