April 21st 2010, Port-au-Prince, Haiti

How do you use the power of football to raise awareness amongst youth about killer diseases such as HIV/AIDS? This month Hope for Children set out to answer that question with a group of 31 football coaches working on a regular basis with vulnerable youth in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

Haiti is the Caribbean country most affected by HIV/AIDS, and the epidemic here is generalized and fuelled by endemic poverty and high illiteracy rates. By the end of 2005, the national HIV prevalence among adults aged 15 to 49 was 3.8 percent, but it has since decreased to 2.2 percent due to effective HIV/AIDS education programs, and increased standard of medical treatment.

In Haiti, HIV is primarily transmitted through heterosexual contact, followed by mother-to-infant transmission. The recent declines in HIV infection rates are most notable in urban areas, and have been attributed to significant behavioural changes, including decreased number of partners, decreased sexual debut, and increased condom use.

However, continued political instability, high internal migration rates, high prevalence of sexually transmitted infections, weakened health and social services and the recent devastating earthquake, which damaged or destroyed the majority of hospitals and schools in this already impoverished nation, have threatened to reverse this positive trend.

One of the things you notice when you visit the innumerable camps created in the aftermath January 12th is that there is usually somebody having a kick about somewhere. As is generally the case the world over, sports coaches here have a unique relationship with their youth teams that straddles the realms of community leader, parental figure, friend and role model. This makes them ideal people to talk to the youth about sensitive issues such as sexual health and HIV/AIDS.

This month, Hope for Children (www.hope4c.org) facilitated a series of train-the-trainer workshops for 31 Haitian youth football coaches, which will enable them to combine discussion, role play, and

### HIV Statistics for Haiti (source UNAIDS)

- People living with HIV, 2007: 120,000
- Women (aged 15+) with HIV, 2007: 58,000
- Children (0-14 yrs) with HIV, 2007: 6,800
- Adult HIV prevalence (%), 2007: 2.2
- AIDS deaths, 2007: 7,200
fun football training sessions to raise awareness about sexual health issues amongst their youth
teams and in their communities. These workshops have been developed by UK NGO Coaching for
Hope (www.coachingforhope.org) and have been rolled out to over 10,000 youth in Africa over the
last few years.

The majority of the coaches involved in this training course work for Hope for Children partner (and
host of this training course) l’Athlétique d’Haiti, who run five after-school sports centres in Haiti.
L’Athlétique d’Haiti (www.lathetiquedhaiti.com) was founded by human rights activist Robert
Duval fifteen years ago with the simple, yet powerful vision of providing organised sports such as
basketball, athletics, karate and, of course, football to youth from the most disadvantaged areas of
Haiti. L’Athlétique d’Haiti currently provide food and sports training to over 1300 youth every day,
as well as a primary school education to 150 boys and girls, and lodging for 50 youth players. Haiti,
like most countries, loves its football, but unfortunately l’Athlétique d’Haiti is one of the few shining
lights which provide opportunities to participate in well organised sports training.

Jonathan Lea-Howarth, the sport for development consultant who facilitated these workshops on
behalf of Hope for Children, was “very impressed with the effort and participation. All the coaches
really engaged with the subject matter and by the end it was clear they had learned a lot. Some of
the role plays they did were absolutely amazing, and of course they loved the football sessions. I’m
now looking forward to seeing them deliver these workshops to the 600 boys and girls work with”.

On the final day the coaches were rewarded for their efforts with Hope for Children t-shirts and
revolutionary indestructible footballs invented by Tim Jahnigen of the One World Futbol Project
(www.oneworldfutbolproject.org), and donated by Yamam Nabeel, Director of FC Unity.

For more information please contact Jonathan Lea-Howarth on 3lions@gmail.com