

**UN Wire**

**22 November 2002**

## **HIV/AIDS: Indian Activists Blast Ministers For Criticizing Bill Gates' Action**

HIV/AIDS activists yesterday blasted senior members of India's government following their criticism of computer magnate Bill Gates' \$100 million grant to combat the spread of the disease.

Indian Human Resources Development Minister Murli Manohar Joshi said Tuesday that "in his enthusiasm to fight out a certain menace, Gates has overdone it."

I.S. Gilada, the head of the nongovernmental People's Health Organization, criticized the remarks, saying "it is a pity to have such ministers" as Joshi. "Joshi should spend half an hour with an HIV-infected person to understand the extent of suffering AIDS can cause instead of nitpicking," he said.

Joshi's statement followed similar comments made last week by Indian Health Minister Shatrughan Sinha, who accused Gates and the U.S. government of "spreading panic" with the "completely inaccurate" claim that India could have 20 million to 25 million HIV/AIDS cases by 2010.

Anjali Gopalan of the Naz Foundation said controversy over such numbers is "meaningless," adding, "It's nonsense. What are they (the government) trying to prove? People are dying" (Parul Gupta, Agence France-Presse, Nov. 21).

In an editorial published yesterday, the Washington Post slammed Sinha's comments, saying the remarks are "especially troubling because, as well as being the health minister, he is a senior adviser to the AIDS initiative that will be funded by" Gates' grant.

"But Mr. Sinha's attitude is not exceptional. India's elites refuse to acknowledge the scope of the challenge confronting them, and in some cases resist serious