The Viral Lowdown: African AIDS Under a TAC

Treatment activists make HIVers mad

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The Africa according to *Newsweek* and *Nightline* is not only ravaged by AIDS (true) but entirely peopled by homeless, barefoot and hungry HIV positive orphans who will never live to see puberty (false). Despite a barrage of recent coverage that culminated in the media circus at Durban's world AIDS conference, the prevailing images of AIDS-stricken Africans have further congealed the continent-as-catastrophe stereotype, leaving Westerners sitting on their hopeless hands. To oversimplifiers of the Fourth Estate, the Treatment Action Campaign, a.k.a. TAC, has something to say. In two years, the group has grown from 10 members to a national coalition of 2,000 -- by putting South Africa in touch with its AIDS anger. Inspired by successful AIDS control in Senegal, Uganda and Zambia, TAC's mission is to "campaign against the view that AIDS is a 'death sentence.'" In its steep battle to stop new infections and ensure access to HIV treatment in South Africa, there's little that TAC doesn't take on, from mother-to-child prevention to lawsuits against the health minister. "Before us, most South Africans didn't know that AIDS can and should be treated," TAC's chairperson Zackie Achmat said. "Now people are aware of pharmaceutical profiteering and government corruption. And they've joined in this fight."

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