Editor’s Letter

Positive Vibrations

September 1, 2007 By Regan Hofmann

I first heard the antigay lyrics of Jamaican reggae star Beenie Man and the band T.O.K. over a year ago, when controversy erupted over the AIDS organization LIFEbeat’s announcement that the performers would join its AIDS Benefit Concert Series in New York in July 2006. Beenie Man and T.O.K., among other Caribbean entertainers, have a history of singing grossly homophobic lyrics. Their words are often intended to incite audiences to riot and “kill the battyman,” as gay men are called in Jamaica, or “hang chi chi gal,” the lesbian equivalent. When the 2006 concert was canceled, I figured Beenie Man and T.O.K. had been silenced—for good. Until, that is, I met Dr. Allyson Leacock at the International AIDS Conference last August—and heard from the Barbados native that the situation had become so dire that she’d asked global media leaders to help her combat the stigma that gay and HIV-positive people face throughout the region. Dr. Leacock, who heads the Caribbean Media Partnership on HIV/AIDS (CBMP), was named one of *POZ*’s “35 Ones to Watch” last December. She told me that the reggae artists were not alone in their stance: People throughout the Caribbean, particularly in Jamaica, are vehemently antigay—and anti HIV-positive.

A quick Google search produces terrifying headlines describing antigay and HIV-related hate crimes throughout the region. Police and government complicity contribute, in turn fueling an escalating AIDS epidemic. We decided to go deeper into the story, and sent our editor Lucile Scott to Kingston, Jamaica. Having collected dozens of interviews, she reports that gay people are indeed afraid to come forward with their sexual orientation, let alone risk the double stigma of saying they are also HIV positive. Straight people also fear getting tested and/or letting people know they are HIV positive; they worry that people will assume they are gay and beat or kill them. It was nearly impossible for us to find someone to photograph our story in Jamaica. One photographer said that *POZ*’s subject matter “conflicts with my personal beliefs, ethics and religion.”

Yet there is hope. A few incredibly brave HIV-positive people, like Ainsley Reid, pictured below and in our story, have come forth to participate in a trailblazing HIV-awareness CBMP campaign. Though it’s been in market for only several months, it appears to be making a difference. As we went to press, performers including Beenie Man had said they will stop performing their antigay lyrics.

The campaign is a testament to the media’s ability to change people’s attitudes. My hope is that

the ads will continue to open up people’s minds so that people of all sexual orientation and HIV status will be able to enjoy the Caribbean’s sugary beaches—without fearing for their lives.

Regan Hofmann
Editor in Chief
Email: editor-in-chief@poz.com

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/jamaica-violence-stigma-12746-4599