

Jamaica too rich for HIV/AIDS funding

Minister of Health Rudyard Spencer has appealed to the representatives of The Global Fund to provide continued funding for HIV/AIDS programmes in Jamaica, after the country became ineligible on income grounds.

Jamaica became ineligible for funding as a result of being categorised by The Global Fund – a global public/private partnership dedicated to attracting and disbursing additional resources to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria – as an upper middle income country. Speaking at the opening of the Global Fund Country Coordinating and Regional Coordinating Mechanisms Workshop held at the Rose Hall Resort and Spa in Montego Bay this morning, Spencer said despite this grouping, Jamaica is now facing serious fiscal challenges and will not be able to take over funding of HIV/AIDS programmes in the next three years. “I believe that the donor community must re-examine the classification especially in light of the impact of the global financial crisis. All sectors are in decline in Jamaica, the economy is weak and experiencing a protracted period of no growth and we continue to have a high debt to GDP ratio. This situation has implications for health spending, health seeking behaviours and health outcomes,” explained Spencer. Jamaica has received US\$26.6 million from The Global Fund to pay for programmes over the next three years. This latest funding support will be used for continue prevention, treatment and care interventions. “Our priority for the next three years will be to increase the number of institutions with HIV workplace policy, continue our efforts to address stigma and discrimination, scale up public education and continue to train health workers, strengthen intersectoral collaboration and strengthen health systems especially our laboratory facilities,” Spencer said. “We have a lot more to do in the fight against HIV/AIDS and we fear that without the sustained funding, our gains will be eroded,” he added. Twenty seven thousand Jamaicans are living with HIV/AIDS. Some 50 per cent of persons affected are unaware of their status, Spencer said. Meanwhile, The Global Fund’s Regional Manager for Latin America and the Caribbean Lelio Marmora, said the secretariat will be lobbying to the board of the fund for regional countries that are in a similar position as Jamaica in a bid to try to continue support.