

S.Africa marks AIDS day with record ribbon

December 2 2012

South Africa, home to the world's largest HIV caseload, on Saturday unveiled a 1.5 kilometre AIDS ribbon in Johannesburg, with activists and officials pledging to curb the epidemic.

Created from over 6,000 red T-shirts pinned together, the ribbon was rolled out at Constitution Hill, which houses the country's Constitutional Court, and unfurled through the streets of Braamfontein.

The ribbon, beating a record previously held by India, is seen as a "visual symbol of the country's commitment to eradicating HIV/AIDS" in a country where six of the 51.8 million inhabitants live with the virus.

"Because of this event we are going to get more awareness," said one of the organisers, Amanda Blankfield of Afrika Tikkun, a health and education NGO.

Organisers of the AIDS [ribbon](#) event will submit [aerial photographs](#) to the [Guinness World Records](#) for verification.

Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe said South Africa was on the right path.

"I can confidently say that the journey towards an AIDS-free world has begun, and South Africa is definitely on the right path," he said in a speech marking World AIDS Day in the northwestern town of Potchefstroom.

Despite being home to the world's largest population of people living with HIV and its biggest consumer of anti-retroviral (ARV) drugs, about a fifth of the world market, South Africa is still battling with stigma around the disease.

"The murder of gay men and lesbians, acts of violence such as so-called 'corrective rapes' are a violation of the rights of others and must be condemned in the strongest possible terms," Motlanthe said.

On Thursday Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi announced South Africa had used its massive market share to negotiate a record-low price on a three-in-one, fixed-dose [combination drug](#), to be rolled out in April next year.

The once-a-day tablet will cost patients 89.37 rand a month (\$10, eight euros), the world's lowest ever for the regimen.

The government plans to expand the treatment to reach 2.5 million people in the next two years.

South Africa once refused to roll out ARVs under former president Thabo Mbeki, whom activists have condemned as an "[AIDS](#) denialist".

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