

Dan's latest adventures in South Africa

Hola hola!

So I figured this would be a good email to send considering today and yesterday have been two of the most interesting and intense days at the Treatment Action Campaign, which is my internship. Yesterday I arrived to be reminded that the executive of UNAIDS was speaking in Khayelitsha. This was a huge deal because UNAIDS is a powerful international org. which I think is based in Geneva and the fact that he was coming to speak in one of the poorest districts in Cape Town first got everyone excited and riled up. Before it started I tried to stay out of the way of the busy people in my office or offer some help. I ended up being asked to highlight some files which was more busy work than anything else.

However, I left early to get into the big tent that had been set up and was surprised to see an extremely well organized set up. TAC is an AIDS activist organization and they have a new set of shirts yearly which they give out at demonstrations or rallies. Around the stage they had set up the old and new shirts and it was interesting to be able to see the issues that had changed from year to year just by looking at the text on a shirt. I sat in the 2nd row next to a journalist (media was all over the place). Finally, the woman running the speaking introduced everyone and made it clear that it was being run on a tight schedule. However, once a person stood up to speak that the crowd either recognized or appreciated rather than just clap loudly a woman in the crowd would cry out a chant which would immediately get picked up by the surrounding audience. This would then lead to dancing circles throughout the hastily thrown together chairs. Eventually the speaker would settle everyone down by gaining their attention through the typical rally chant which begins with "Viva TAC Viva!" and the crowd replies strongly "Viiiva!" There's also a great chant which originated during apartheid protests - The speaker cries "Amonda!" then a powerful response - "Awaytu!" Although the spelling is definitely incorrect, it means "Power!" - "To the people!" This has to be said strongly because if not you'll be laughed out for saying 'power' in a weak way.

One by one speakers came up. This included the Minister of Health, a man and a woman both openly living with HIV, a random guy that hopped on stage with a weird hoodie/doorag mix that rapped in Xhosa while pumping up the crowd with repeated rhymes to "Yes we can!" and finally the executive of UNAIDS. Instead of being the conservative head that has made it difficult in the past for AIDS organizations to succeed he congratulated Khayelitsha on the progress they had made and how they had become a model to the world. He also agreed to follow through with the fiscal needs of clinics treating HIV and TB patients. He was given loud applause and then the crowd, including myself, was fed with a bagged lunch consisting of two sandwiches - cheese and weird meat, a juice box, and an apple. Everyone was happy and excited and I ended my day becoming better friends with one of my co-workers who takes a big part in organizing the rallies. That was yesterday.

Today I went to a rally in front of Parliament at 11. This rally was held because due to mismanaged budget issues, there is not enough money to care for newly diagnosed HIV patients only enough for those that have been currently taking the ARV's - Antiretrovirals. So there was a picket outside of Parliament. The day before I was given a shirt which boldly states HIV POSITIVE to wear to the rally. This shirt was created as a way to show solidarity and strength while diminishing the negative stigma for those with HIV. Before leaving I threw the shirt on and went into the city with 2 girls on the way to their internship. We split up and I walked the remainder by myself. I was given a few weird looks, some smiles, and a few people read the shirt out loud. The most remarkable reaction was at a point when I thought I had gotten lost in the city, an old black woman stopped me to tell me how courageous I was for wearing that shirt. She explained how her son was HIV positive and too scared and ashamed to wear the shirt. She explained more about her life and how the fact that there's now medicine to aid HIV has improved the life of people with AIDS and people affected by AIDS. I continuously thanked her without informing her that I was just a white kid wearing the shirt for a rally. I continued to walk on and thought that despite the fact I don't have HIV, by wearing the shirt it is a shout to others with HIV not to be worried and to boldly accept their life and know that they can still live enjoyably.

I walked with a slight strut after that little meeting and after asking a few people how to get to Parliament I found the picketing rally and joined in. I was aware of the fact I was the only white guy but still excitedly chimed in with everyone's chants. There was at one point a chant that involved some dancing and while I stood on the outskirts of the circle clapping and singing, my co worker Amelia somehow scoped me out and brought me into the middle. I danced about laughing and clapping (making sure to be on rhythm) and attempted the dances that the people next to me were doing. I eventually backed out and rejoined the sign holding and yelling. The head of TAC, Zackie Achmat, who I have not met as of yet showed up and was talking to one of my co-workers, Gilad. I walked over and introduced myself. He was an extremely nice guy and I was lucky enough to get some pictures with him. After some speakers spoke out on the megaphone and a miscellaneous man from congress signed the memorandum the rally was basically over. I walked back to the train with another great experience etched into my mind.

Ciao and mucho love.

-Dan

QUESTIONS

Paragraph 1

a. Why was it a good moment to send an e-mail?

b. What kind of organisation is UNAIDS?

c. Who was speaking in Khayelitsha?

d. Did Daniel manage to get rid of his work?

Paragraph 2

a. What was there on display at the tent?

b. Where did Daniel sit when he was in the tent?

c. How did people react when someone spoke at the meeting?

d. What kind of chants did they sing?

Paragraph 3

a. Who was give loud applause after speaking?

b. What did the audience eat after the speeches?

Paragraph 4

a. What kind of rally did Daniel attend?

b. What time was the demonstration?

c. What kind of T-shirt did Daniel wear at the demo?

d. Who did Daniel meet on the way to the demo? What did he/she tell him?

e. How did Daniel feel wearing that T-shirt?

Paragraph 5

a. What were the people at the rally doing?

b. Who did Daniel take pictures of?

c. What did Daniel do after the rally was over?

d. Did Daniel enjoy that day?

Vocabulary. Find words in the text that mean:

- a. To make agitated or angry (p1)
- b. Rapidly, in a hurry (p2)
- c. Jumped on, went on (p3)
- d. Financial plan, how much money an organisation will need or spend in a specific period of time (p4)
- d. Unfair treatment (p4)
- e. The rest or the part left of a way or distance (p4)
- f. Bravely, without fear (p4)
- g. To walk in a proud way trying to look important (p5)
- h. imprinted, engraved (p5)