

# Campaign to reduce stigma of AIDS

By Gemma Handy

**A CAMPAIGN to reduce stigma and discrimination associated with AIDS kicked off in the TCI this week.**

Members of the National AIDS Programme hope to spread the message 'Discrimination does not protect against HIV – It hurts'.

A special launch took place on Tuesday at the organisation's Grand Turk office.

The aim is to seek greater acceptance and tolerance for those infected and boost their quality of life.

Health care workers, along with the private sector and general public, are being urged to lend support.

The initiative is part of a regional campaign in line with action being taken by Caricom.

There are currently more than 330,000 adults and children living with HIV across the Caribbean, 10 per cent of which are newly infected cases.

AIDS accounted for around 27,000 deaths in 2005 and is the leading cause of death for 15 to 44-year-olds according to UN statistics.

More than half of adults living with the virus are women.

The Caribbean is now the second most infected region in the world with higher prevalence rates found only in sub-Saharan Africa.

In the Bahamas, along with Haiti and Trinidad and Tobago, more than two per cent of the adult population is living with HIV.

The disease is transmitted mainly through heterosexual contact with the general infection rate growing each year.

Adolescents and young adults, especially girls between 15 to 19 years old, are particularly vulnerable, due in part to early sexual initiation.

In some instances, teenage girls outnumber boys by five to one for new infections.

All governments in the region have developed, or are in the process of developing, national plans of action.

The campaign is supported by the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC), the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO).