

Religious Leadership in Response to HIV

A Summit of High Level Religious Leaders

22 - 23 March 2010
The Netherlands

Responsible Partnership

Challenging Stigma and Discrimination: HIV prevention in action

Statement

This Summit has brought together High Level Religious Leaders from the Baha'í, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and indigenous traditions. Religious leaders have been accompanied by people living with HIV from within and outside of our faith communities, representatives of networks and organizations active in the response to HIV, political leaders and leaders of UN agencies in this meeting. The summit met in Den Dolder near Utrecht in the Netherlands from 21 to 23 March 2010.

We have recognized, with a renewed sense of urgency, the scale and continued growth of the the HIV pandemic globally. Almost thirty years after the first identification of HIV, inspite of the science which has been developed, and notwithstanding the considerable moral and global material resources that we have access to, we have continued to witness the pandemic escalating. It grows exponentially; for every two people put on treatment there are another five newly infected. Changing the current trajectory of the HIV pandemic will involve holistic prevention including Safer Practices, Available medical and nutritional interventions, Voluntary counselling and testing and Empowerment (SAVE). In addition, the prevention must challenge stigma, shame, denial, discrimination, inaction and misaction (SSDDIM).

We are cognizant of the invaluable role of the faith communities in the pandemic so far, particularly relating to treatment, care and support. We affirm the dignity and value of human life. With remorse we regret that those living with HIV have at times been at the receiving end of judgement, rejection, a limited ability to embrace and affirm humanity in its diversity and to recognize how we and our faiths are all implicated in this pandemic. We need to make greater efforts to ensure that all people living with HIV find a welcome within faith communities. We recognise and embrace the call on all religious leaders and communities to respond urgently and inclusively to challenges posed by HIV and AIDS, not only in relation to treatment, care and support, but also the prevention of HIV transmission.

HIV affects every human being, every woman and man, every child, every community including religious leaders. Stigma and discrimination foster an environment that exacerbates vulnerability to HIV infection which would not exist if we could collectively create a safe environment of acceptance and inclusion relating to HIV. Secrecy and silence keep a variety of vulnerable populations from accessing prevention services, testing and treatment in relation to HIV. We must work to end the silence that fosters stigma and discrimination.

Social, political and economic conditions create a climate within which the vulnerability that drives the HIV pandemic grows. This is exacerbated by the increasing dislocation of families and communities through economic and humanitarian crises. We need to realign our messages to speak and act not only for personal morality and responsibility, but for communal morality and responsibility addressing urgency for financial, social and economic justice. The HIV pandemic is both complex and multifaceted and demands that we work together. Working out of our areas of strength, we can achieve universal access to prevention, treatment, care and support.

Call to Action

As such we call for:

- Attitudes and actions that affirm universal respect for the dignity of every human being;
- Universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support;
- Universal respect for the human rights of all people living with and affected by and at risk of HIV infection;
- Community support for caregivers;
- The education, empowerment and accompaniment of orphans and other vulnerable children;
- Listen to the voices of young people and creating spaces for their leadership and participation;
- Concerted efforts and programmes for the eradication of stigma and discrimination in all its manifestations towards people living with HIV regardless of how they became infected;
- Retaining Health and HIV as key priorities in the global funding agenda, despite the current financial crisis;
- Tackling stigma and discrimination through HIV and AIDS policy, strategic plans, budgets and resource allocations;
- Countries and agencies that have appointed HIV Ambassadors to be commended and to be strongly encouraged to maintain this witness to engagement and prioritizing of HIV;
- A massive social mobilization to prevent vertical transmission of HIV from parent to child including care and support to the parents and care givers;
- Men strongly engaged, alongside the women's movement, in action to end all forms of violence against women and girls;
- Countries to openly acknowledge and know their own pandemics and to respond to all vulnerable people within their own countries and communities;
- Countries and communities to work for the total eradication of the HIV pandemic;
- Religious leaders to continue the dialogue around HIV related stigma and discrimination started in Den Dolder with religious leaders in their countries and communities;
- Media campaigns to communicate the importance of religious leadership in relation to HIV.

Commitment

We commit ourselves to a partnership between faith communities, broader civil society, government and other international partners, always involving People living with HIV at all levels. We hold each other accountable in this partnership, eradicating stigma and discrimination and jointly enabling the universal access to prevention, treatment, care and support which will lead us to a new world, a world of respect, justice, love and dignity for all of our world's people.