



Live the Promise: HIV and AIDS Campaign

Press Release

10 June 2011

AIDS Review: Faith leaders assess new targets, embrace justice

(New York) - Religious leaders attending the high-level HIV and AIDS review at the United Nations are expressing both praise and some disappointment about the declaration coming out of the three-day event.

Particularly welcome, said Peter Prove, executive director of the Geneva-based Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, is the expected declaration's establishment of a time-bound numerical target of getting 15 million people on ARV treatment by 2015.

Prove also said the EAA welcomes the declaration's commitment to closing the HIV and AIDS resource gap by 2015, estimated by UNAIDS to be US \$6 billion a year, and its recognition that psycho-social, spiritual and palliative care are essential to comprehensive care and support services.

"The inclusion of clear numerical targets for reducing sexual transmission of HIV by 50 percent and the goal to eliminate vertical transmission [the transmission of HIV from mother to child] by 2015" are other positive steps, he said.

At the same time, Prove noted that despite recognizing the disproportionate impact of HIV and AIDS on women, the political declaration "sets no specific prevention, treatment, and care targets for women and girls."

J.P. Mokgethi-Heath, acting executive director of the South Africa-based International Network of Religious Leaders Living with or Personally Affected by HIV and AIDS (INERELA+), said he was concerned that specific populations affected by HIV, such as sex workers, men who have sex with men and intravenous drug users, while mentioned in the document's preamble are not mentioned in the document's specific action plan.

Mokgethi-Heath also said the document strongly acknowledges the need to overcome stigma and discrimination, but does not sufficiently acknowledge "the vulnerability that stigma and discrimination creates for people."

Prove stated: "Stigma, discrimination, marginalization and exclusion are inconsistent with the recognition of the God-given human dignity of every person. We also know from operational and practical experience in the HIV response that stigma and discrimination are obstacles to effective and comprehensive prevention, testing and treatment."

"We appreciate that the declaration reaffirms the centrality of human rights in the AIDS response, and focuses on enabling legal, social and policy frameworks for the elimination of stigma, discrimination, and violence," he continued. "Human rights obligations – especially the principle of non-discrimination – reflect fundamental faith principles concerning respect for human dignity."

Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance

150, route de Ferney
PO Box 2100
1211 Geneva 2
Switzerland

Alianza Ecu mica de Acci n Mundial

150, route de Ferney
Apartado postal 2100
1211 Ginebra 2
Suiza

Alliance Oecum nique «Agir Ensemble»

150, route de Ferney
Case postale 2100
1211 Gen ve 2
Suisse

Globales  kumenisches Aktionsb ndnis

150, route de Ferney
Postfach 2100
1211 Genf 2
Schweiz

☎ + 41 22 791 6723
☎ + 41 22 710 2387
✉ info@e-alliance.ch
www.e-alliance.ch

Prove added: "It is important that at least some of the key populations have been named in the declaration. This clear recognition is long overdue."

An interfaith prayer breakfast on 10 June, the last day of the three-day global event, was co-organized by the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, UNAIDS, and UNFPA in collaboration with other religious organizations and hosted by the Ford Foundation. Over 100 participants heard numerous affirmations of the need for the religious community to move beyond commitment to action.

A repeated theme by various faith, governmental and civil society representatives was the need for the faith community to embrace a vision of what Mokgethi-Heath called "healing without judgment, embracing justice."

In an interview, Gunilla Hallonsten, acting policy director for the Church of Sweden, said faith-based communities have done much that is good, yet must also, in the wake of a history of judgment, particularly in the early days of the AIDS epidemic, affirm the recognition that "all humans are created in the image of God."

Dr Asha-Rose Migiro, deputy secretary general of the United Nations, told the audience of faith leaders that they were "natural activists who can change attitudes."

"Speak out. End marginalization. Don't be silent. Be a force for reconciliation," she said. "You can be the difference between shame and pride ... between life and death."

The text of the draft political declaration and the webcast of the interfaith prayer breakfast are available at: <http://www.e-alliance.ch/en/s/hivaids/accountability/ungass/>

Photos from the Interfaith Prayer Breakfast available on request to Sara Speicher, sspeicher@e-alliance.ch

For more information and for interviews with religious leaders contact:

Becky Johnson (in New York), bjohnson@e-alliance.ch Mobile: +1-702-994-5524

The **Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance** is a broad international network of churches and Christian organizations cooperating in advocacy on food and HIV and AIDS. The Alliance is based in Geneva, Switzerland. For more information, see <http://www.e-alliance.ch/>